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ROBERT F. KENNEDY: THE SENATE YEARS

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ABSTRACT OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY: THE SENATE YEARS

This study traces Kennedy's political development from his election to the Senate in 1964 to his death in 1968.

During that time, he transformed from a hesitant and orthodox liberal to spearhead a new radicalism and develop an alternative coalition for the Democratic Party. In the domestic arena, he proposed an alternative approach for urban renewal, and became remarkably popular with black voters (even more popular than has previously been accepted). This study attempts to fathom the full extent of this relationship and how powerful it could have become.

Kennedy was also among the first politicians of his generation to use the political muscle of the youth groups which were springing up in the mid-'60s, and the alternative labour organisations (most notably in California) which found themselves excluded from the old union power structures.

The study also charts his rise in the anti-Vietnam war movement, and questions his reputation as a hard-line anti-communist which emerged during the Kennedy administration.

It examines his presidential campaign in the context of his alternative liberal coalition, and an analysis of his primary results suggests that the accepted wisdom of a Kennedy poverty coalition (made up of low-income black and white voters) is largely mythological.

Finally, the study offers some tentative conclusions about the real nature of Kennedy's contribution to modern liberalism, and a brief historiography.

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INTRODUCTION

JUST BEFORE the nomination of Bill Clinton at the 1992 Democratic Convention in New York, a documentary film of Robert Kennedy was shown to delegates in the hall. For 20 minutes the convention stood silent as Kennedy's image appeared on the giant screen, his words echoing across the decades to a new generation of Democrats hoping for a presidential victory.

The symbolism was clear: Clinton wanted to be associated with Democrats who could win elections. The film portrayed Kennedy as the last great radical, the last legendary Democrat. It featured his glorious presidential campaign of the spring in 1968, and his romantic and tragic death.

It served to rally Democrats to their new leader, and projected Robert Kennedy as the spirit and soul of the great liberal tradition. In a tribute to Kennedy's political legacy, the 1968 campaign was presented as a romantic and idealistic quest to end the war and restore social justice.

Despite Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, despite Jimmy

Carter's win in 1976, it was Robert Kennedy's 1968 campaign which liberals hoped would inspire a revival.

Although Robert Kennedy is best remembered today for the 1968 presidential campaign, and his years as Attorney General in his brother's administration, his real political legacy was forged in the Senate.

His reputation as a ruthless investigator dated from his prosecution of union corruption in a Senate committee during the 1950s, and his position as senator from New York (1965 to his death in 1968) was the only elected office he ever held.

Although a reluctant senator (he would, at least originally, preferred to have been vice-president and was often impatient with the slow, deliberate nature of the legislative body) his personal history ensured that he would always be more than just the junior member from New York. By 1965 he was already a national politician, and during his three and a half years as senator he embarked on a remarkable transformation of his politics which later reverberated throughout the Democratic Party.

On entering the Senate after the 1964 elections, Kennedy found the old liberal agenda largely exhausted: blacks were on the verge of winning full voting rights, money was available for poverty and education programmes, and democracy was being protected in South Vietnam. Nevertheless, problems obviously remained, which led Kennedy to develop a new radicalism.

His sharp move to the left of his party was so extreme that it produced an almost unique strand of liberalism,

personal to Kennedy. The electoral demise of orthodox liberalism since the 1960s makes Kennedy's ideology - which was never fully tested and therefore never "failed" - enormously attractive for today's liberal candidates.

He was unique - a bona fide radical who could win. His former press secretary Frank Mankiewicz describes him as a "tough liberal", which is now almost a contradiction in American political terms.¹ One reporter at the 1960 Democratic Convention noted that "whenever you see Bobby Kennedy in public with his brother, he looks as though he showed up for a rumble", and his reputation as the White House toughie developed throughout the Kennedy administration.² It was Bobby Kennedy who stood firm over the Cuban Missile Crisis (although not as firm as was originally believed), Bobby Kennedy who sent his deputy to stand eyeball to eyeball with George Wallace at the entrance to the University of Alabama, and Bobby Kennedy who championed the Green Beret counter-insurgency force.

Much of the image was hype, of course, which was encouraged by the White House to counter claims that the Attorney General was young and inexperienced. A decisive and efficient image was deliberately projected, although at times Kennedy really does appear to have moved with remarkable aggression. During problems with the steel companies in 1962, for instance, Kennedy unleashed the full power of his office against individual steel executives who, the Kennedy administration believed, had betrayed an earlier understanding not to raise prices. "I had the grand jury," he later recalled.

"We looked over all of them as individuals. We were going to go for broke: their expense accounts and where they'd been and what they'd been doing. I picked up all their records and I told the FBI to interview them all - march into their offices the next day. All of them were subpoenaed for their personal records....If I started an investigation of you in your community, you're ruined. The FBI coming round and asking all the neighbours: 'What do you know?'....You'd never recover".³

The ruthless image began to fade after the assassination in Dallas, as American television viewers saw Kennedy suffering at his brother's funeral. No softening job by public relations experts was needed for Kennedy's 1964 Senate race, as he was perceived by the public to be a man engulfed by grief and burdened by the responsibility of carrying on his brother's political work. A wave of emotion almost took him to the vice-presidency in 1964, but Johnson managed to avoid offering it to him. Nevertheless, the sympathy vote did play a large part in his New York Senate victory.

Kennedy's election to the Senate came less than a year after the JFK assassination, and his campaign had relied on his family name and White House experience. As such, he had not been required to outline a clear manifesto for his plans

for New York. Barry Goldwater remarked in 1966 that "there is a religious fervour building up about his guy that is even stronger than they built up around Jack".⁴

He was the benefactor of what Max Weber described as a "transferral of charisma" from his dead brother, which gave him considerable room for manoeuvre in developing links with almost any political group he chose.

His immediate and obvious need was to stake out a political base for himself (although he had won New York comfortably, he had relied on assistance from Lyndon Johnson). At the outset of 1965, he could have moved in several directions, but chose - either through acute political cunning, or personal preference, and probably both - to outflank his rivals to the left of the party and claim the most radical wing for himself.

This was not a cold decision he took one morning on entering Congress, but rather a series of responses made to political and international events during 1965 and 1966. It soon became clear, however, that Kennedy had the potential to commandeer the radical element in the Democratic Party, and use it as his political base. There were many, of course, who would have followed Kennedy whatever position he had taken on Vietnam, or the ghettos, but he had to do a lot of convincing before he could hope to become the new liberal darling.

He started early, criticising the President's handling of the situation in the Dominican Republic, charging that Johnson had been too heavy-handed on the reformers just because some communists might have been involved.

The leftward shift accelerated in the next couple of years, when he broke from the administration in early 1966 over Vietnam and, later that year, on the Alliance for Progress. Other Senate liberals remained more cautious and less aware of the potential of the new political forces emerging in the country. Liberal colleagues like McCarthy, Mondale and McGovern still approached poverty problems with New Deal remedies, whereas Kennedy was proposing radical programmes to lure private investment into the ghettos.

Arthur Waskow, a contributing editor to the radical magazine Ramparts, described Kennedy at this time as "a new kind of liberal, in the same way the SDS and SNCC are new kinds of radicals".⁵ Kennedy was never fully cognitive of how far this alternative coalition might go, or even what it would look like, but in '67 and '68 he was at least aware that it had serious political potential.

The study of Kennedy's Senate career which follows aims to trace his attempt at moulding an alternative power coalition. He responded early to the new political forces of the mid-60s, notably the black and youth movements. However, the political forces centred around women's issues and those concentrating on health/ecological concerns had yet to take off in a significant way by 1968, and he never enjoyed the support which these groups later provided to Democratic candidates.

Although the National Organisation for Women (NOW) was formed in 1966, its relations with the rest of the left were strained at this time, as mainstream liberalism initially regarded it as a threat. The New Left, whose radicalism

appealed to Kennedy, was also hostile. Women demanding attention to women's liberation at an SDS convention in 1966 "were pelted with tomatoes and thrown out of the convention".⁶ Anyway, the women's liberation movement had not mustered enough political muscle in the mid-60s for Kennedy to have regarded it as essential to his coalition, and the first feminist activity to get front-page coverage (the disruption of a Miss America beauty contest) did not happen until September 1968, four months after Kennedy's death.

Nevertheless, Kennedy reached towards some of the emerging forces before any other national figure realised their significance. He tried to understand how they could be put together to make a powerful national constituency which he could lead.

At times, however, he could be ridiculously off-target in his search for blocks to build the new framework. In reaching out to the youth movement, he invited hippie poet Allen Ginsberg to his Senate office for a political talk in early 1968. Ginsberg described how he treated Kennedy to a monologue on the joys of drugs, but was finally interrupted by the senator. "He wanted to know the relationship between the flower-power people or the hip-generation people and the Black Power leaders. He wanted to know whether there was any kind of political relationship or any political muscle behind such a coalition. I said I had turned onto grass a number of times in Nashville with Stokely Carmichael. But it didn't extend to any formal political alliance...".⁷

Kennedy, while realising there was something in the

anti-war demonstrations and the hippie counter-culture, never fully grasped what sort of movement it was, and saw it in strictly political terms. He needed to know if it could be turned into political muscle. Occasionally, however, his heart ruled his head, as could be seen with his interest in Indian and Eskimo affairs, when it would appear that hard political considerations were not paramount. Other forays into "unpopular" areas (ie those without obvious political capital) included siding with Cesar Chavez and the grape-pickers against some West coast fruit companies.

Even so, this identification with politically weak groups can also be seen as a wider part of Kennedy's jigsaw in breaking away from the traditional labour power blocks. Kennedy had problems with some organised labour dating back to his prosecution of union leaders in the previous decade.

Nevertheless, he needed to show he was on the workers' side if he were to become the new radical hope, and opportunities like links with Chavez - whose union was not part of the old established network - offered the opportunity to identify with strikers while avoiding association with big-time unionism. Kennedy admirer Jack Newfield described Kennedy "not as anti-union, but un-union", in a phrase perfectly inoffensive to all those Kennedy was trying to woo.⁶

However, this is not to suggest that Kennedy's Senate career was simply one long bid for the 1968 presidential election. By identifying himself with the new political forces he was broadening his political base, and making himself a more significant national figure. This

constituency could be used not just for the a presidential campaign, but would also secure his power base in New York, make him more attractive as a vice-presidential candidate for the extra weight he could bring to the ticket (an outside possibility he considered seriously until early 1967), and would enable him to make more progress on the issues he believed in.

These considerations motivated the search for a new coalition and dictated the policy directions he took while in the Senate. Although they were not incompatible, from time to time one consideration would take priority over the others like, for example, the decision to enter the 1968 primaries.

Moreover, Kennedy's search for a new coalition did not mean he burned his bridges with the old. Kennedy's political training, above all, had been in winning elections and managing campaigns. Some parts of the old Democratic coalition were still extremely powerful and, of course, it would have been virtually impossible for Kennedy to have become the party's nominee without the blessing of dozens of political professionals, the most powerful of which was Chicago's Mayor Daley. Although the old boss structures had largely been undermined by the New Deal reforms, which struck at the patronage power of municipal officials, by 1968 the new politics had not yet fully taken over. Only a minority of states held presidential primaries, for example, and throughout his Senate career Kennedy was careful to remain in favour with party hacks who represented the remnants of the old order.

Additionally, Kennedy's problem during this time of political flux was that no-one knew exactly how powerful any of these particular movements really were. The New Hampshire primary of March 1968 suggested the depth of anti-Johnson feeling, but the Vietnam War remained popular during Kennedy's Senate career (although he did detect that its appeal was fading), and there was little way of knowing how the country would react at election time to the rioting which characterised black frustration during the mid-60s.

To accommodate the variables Kennedy's approach appears to have been one of "options open". No door was shut, no group left behind, no political leader offended unless it was absolutely necessary. This, of course, is basic political sense, but it is remarkable that Kennedy managed to keep so many plates spinning, as it were, while other national figures were forced to identify with one side of an issue or the other.

The best example is on the Vietnam War. Kennedy could oppose US involvement in the war, but - unlike other politicians - could easily evade the charges of being "soft on communism" because of his earlier record as Attorney General. Similarly, while Kennedy was regarded as sympathetic to the black struggle, he had also been the chief law enforcement officer in the country for four years, as he regularly reminded voters during the Indiana primary of 1968.

Kennedy's personal history made his political position extraordinary -- he did not enter the Senate with the same problems of issue-identification which beset his colleague,

and had a much freer role in developing his policy than most other senators.

As such, he was able to make huge leaps in policy direction in a very short space of time. In 1956, he had persuaded George Wallace to back John Kennedy's bid for the vice-presidential nomination. By 1966, Kennedy was trying to identify himself with the emerging black consciousness movement. In 1963, he was publicly an ardent proponent of the war against communists in Vietnam, but by 1966 he appeared to be advocating a coalition government there.

In fairness, however, it should be pointed out that he had privately voiced qualms about the war as early as September 6 1963. Pentagon minutes of a confidential National Security Council (NSC) meeting (only published after Kennedy's death) report him as reasoning that if the war was unwinnable by any foreseeable South Vietnamese regime, it was time to get out of Vietnam. During the meeting, Kennedy also advocated giving US Ambassador to Saigon Henry Cabot Lodge "the necessary power to sort things out if Diem is the problem" (ie replace the Diem regime).⁹

Kennedy was not alone in rapid policy development during these years, of course, but his personal history, and his capacity to recognise new political movements at an early stage, make his career in the Senate a fascinating case study of a liberal politician.

On Kennedy's funeral train, psychiatrist Dr Leonard Duhl noted that the crowd of Kennedy supporters included "oddballs....You really began to see what a floating crap game it was. Bobby essentially began to evolve a form of

coalition politics. Now, I don't think he understood all of this verbally, and he couldn't put it together. But yet, he was sensing this; so many people on the train could not understand why everybody else was there; they didn't understand this floating crap game in which he was the centre and connecting link, and that all the other players were not like themselves".¹⁰

Whether Kennedy had put enough of this new coalition together in 1968 will never be known. George McGovern laid claim to its modern half in 1972, but without ultimate success. Ted Kennedy could not resurrect it powerfully enough in 1980, either, and perhaps it would never have been strong enough to take Kennedy to the presidency. Newfield believes that Kennedy "was trying to test a revisionist liberalism before there was a party or coalition to sustain it".¹¹ Kennedy certainly tried to put the coalition together years ahead of its time and, as a later examination of the primary returns suggest, might well have pulled it off.

Quite how much this new liberalism relied on Kennedy's own personality should also be addressed: his brother Ted, for instance, ran for the presidency in 1980 on issues and with an organisation very similar to Robert Kennedy's, but without the same success (although, significantly, Ted Kennedy's bid for the 1980 nomination did prove useful in redefining the party's basic principles, identifying employment as the primary issue, for example).

Thus a study of Robert Kennedy's development from conservative to perhaps the first neo-liberal, from fierce anti-communist to hero of the SDS, from Republican voter in

1956 to radical Democratic senator in 1968, might offer some clues to present-day liberals on how to modernise the left into a popular and radical force.

NOTES

Where possible, I have given the context of speeches, remarks, etc included in the text (eg RFK to Senate chamber). All of the references in RFK: In His Own Words are from conversations Kennedy recorded for an oral history programme, and so were all made in confidence on the understanding that they would not be made public during his lifetime.

Where the source is repeated, I have used ibid followed by the original reference. For example, note 7 has the instruction ibid no. 2, which means the same source as note 2 (in this case, Stein) followed by a different page number).

1. Personal interview with Manciewicz, May 1985
2. Stein p212
3. RFK: In His Own Words p316
4. Kimball p129
5. Arthur Waskow in November 1967 edition of The Nation.
6. Deckard p332. The women's movement had a very tough reception from the mainstream and radical left. Stokely Carmichael's famous phrase that "the only position for women in SNCC is prone" was largely indicative of reactions in the mid-'60s. Kennedy did not regard the women's movement as politically significant, but he would have been in a fairly strong position to have cultivated links to it had he lived,

or had it managed to organise before mid-'68. Although JFK was not as popular with women voters as legend suggests (he lost the women's vote 51% to Nixon by 49%), he made some effort to respond to women's concerns.

In December 1961, President Kennedy established a presidential commission on the Status of Women. Its report was made public in October 1963, and recommended that JFK issue an Executive Order embodying the principle of equal opportunity in employment. The following month, a few days before his death, JFK set up the Interdepartmental Committee on the Status of Women. RFK could have made a fairly persuasive case that women's issues had been addressed seriously by the JFK administration. In the months after RFK's death, the women's movement did begin to make its presence felt politically, and black feminist Shirley Chisholm was elected to Congress in November 1968.

7. *ibid* no. 2 p290.

8. *ibid* no. 5.

9. *ibid* no. 2 p389.

10. Pentagon Papers, p181

11. Newfield p180

I. KENNEDY, POVERTY AND CIVIL RIGHTS

"Too white to be all right..." - Eldridge Cleaver of RFK

RACE wasn't the primary issue in the election campaign of 1960. John Kennedy did invoke Abraham Lincoln during a television debate with Richard Nixon, but only to illuminate a point he was making about the Cold War, and not to highlight the candidates' differences in racial policies.

Although John Kennedy won a large percentage of the black vote in the election (68%), his identification with the issue probably owed as much to the highly-publicised intervention he made during the campaign on behalf of the jailed Martin Luther King as his rather unspectacular voting record on civil rights.¹

If John Kennedy's political career was not especially identified with the issue by 1960, his brother's involvement in "the negro question" had almost been non-existent. His main political experience had been on various Senate

committees, notably during the McCarthy hearings and on the McClelland racket committee, where he had earned a reputation as a tough interrogator during investigations into corruption in unions. By the time of his formal appointment as Attorney General in 1961, Robert Kennedy's political experience was largely confined to these years as a member of the Congressional staff, and to managing John Kennedy's bid for the 1956 vice-presidential nomination and the successful run at the presidency in 1960.

He admitted to Harris Wofford (later White House Special Assistant on Civil Rights) in 1960: "We really don't know much about this whole thing....I haven't known many negroes in my life....It's up to you. Tell us where we are and go to it."² Model liberals though they were, at the time of winning power the Kennedys couldn't even claim that some of their best friends were black. "I won't say I stayed awake at nights worrying about civil rights before I became Attorney General" Robert Kennedy later remembered. Three months into the Kennedy administration, he was forced to resign his membership from Washington's Metropolitan Club on the grounds that it refused to serve blacks.³

During his time in the White House, Robert Kennedy's position as head of the Justice Department meant that his efforts in the field were concentrated on enforcing the law on matters like desegregation and voting rights, rather than analysing social conditions in the inner-cities. Although poverty was a major problem for blacks at the time, it was not illegal, and so did not come in for special scrutiny by the Attorney General's office, except where it overlapped

with criminal issues like drugs, or gun control.

During his years in the Justice Department, Kennedy successfully petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission to desegregate bus terminals in interstate travel facilities, and filed numerous suits to promote black voter registration. However, he had also permitted wire taps to be placed on the telephones of Martin Luther King and King's aide, Stanley Levison. When the existence of the taps became known, Kennedy experienced considerable animosity from black leaders, although this hostility was not generally shared by the majority of blacks, who increasingly came to regard him as a hero.

Generally, Attorney General Kennedy preferred to confine the issue to one of voting, and encouraged black leaders to press for voting rights as it placed them clearly on the side of law enforcement, and was less of an immediate threat to whites than the desegregation of public amenities. The moves to desegregate the bus terminals only came after well-organised and highly-publicised campaigns by non-governmental civil rights' activists threatened to embarrass the administration.

Robert Kennedy had criticised the Freedom Riders for generating bad publicity which weakened his brother's hand at a meeting with Khrushchev, and during the desegregation of the universities at Alabama and Mississippi was keen to settle the controversy quickly, and without undue embarrassment to local politicians. However, Kennedy did become increasingly aware that the issue was not confined to voting power, partly from his participation in the

administration's committee on delinquents, which he chaired. Set up in 1961, the committee included the Secretaries of Health, Education and Welfare. Congress had also passed the Juvenile Delinquency Act, which authorised expenditure of \$30 million over three years to test new approaches to delinquency prevention and control. This increasing realisation that the problem of civil rights was compounded by economic dimensions and special problems associated with the inner cities elicited traditional remedies - the appropriation of federal money, administered by the larger government departments in Washington.

Delinquency was regarded by Robert Kennedy and others in the White House as a disease which could be cured if sufficient federal resources were made available. In a speech called "Juvenile Delinquency: An Ounce of Prevention", delivered in New York in 1962, the Attorney General noted how one delinquent was "doing well in the prison high school, and making rapid progress...because of his dramatic response to treatment."⁴

This type of response, which relied heavily on the animal laboratory approach to urban problems, permeated much liberal thinking. Much liberal thinking on civil rights and poverty at this time was influenced by works like Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma, perhaps the standard exposition of post-war liberal orthodoxy. It was Myrdal in 1944 who cited white prejudice and racism as the roots of black disadvantage, and defined the issue in moral terms. Discrimination was something which ought to be fought in the best traditions of American democratic ideals, he proposed.

Myrdal suggested that the worst excesses of inequality could be fought by vigorous and committed federal action, and his analysis provided the foundation for liberal reformers through the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, Robert Kennedy (through his ideas for private enterprise in urban renewal) became one of the first major figures to challenge its basic assumptions.

By the early 1960s, however, poverty was only beginning to appear on the political agenda as a serious issue. Michael Harrington's 1962 book The Other America had a great impact on popular and governmental appreciation of poverty, and urban centres were regarded as valid testing-grounds for many pet theories. An explosion in the popularity of social sciences, coupled with a dramatic increase in available government funds, saw sociologists produce a substantial amount of data on ghettos. In 1956, federal funding for social science research was \$4 million, and had grown to \$44 million by 1966.⁵

The staff of the delinquency committee (often referred to as the HEW committee after the initials of the relevant government departments), included Richard Boone of the Ford Foundation. At the time, the Ford Foundation was among those trying out the idea of community participation in poverty programmes, and Robert Kennedy's assistant, David Hackett, sought out the ideas of the institution's experts on urban poverty. Boone, on the other hand, had studied at the University of Chicago, where he had worked on the idea of community participation, which the university had pioneered during the 1920s and 1930s.

The idea of community action, of working with rather than for the poor, was put on the national agenda during this time. The HEW committee was perfectly happy with the idea of local participation, as long as it did not reduce the power of City Hall officials in the urban centres. Later proponents of the scheme may have wished this emphasis on co-ordination with city government had been maintained.

Local involvement in poverty legislation, or Community Action Programmes (CAPs), as it became known, was formally introduced to the federal government through the HEW committee, and to the rest of the country through the War on Poverty legislation of 1964. In the Kennedy administration, however, it remained largely a sociological theory whose reality was confined to a moderately successful experiment in the lower east side of New York. The New York experiment was funded by the Ford Foundation and the HEW, and had the federal government not found itself enjoying such a surplus of funds, the CAP may never have reached a national scale.

However, as Daniel Patrick Moynihan (Assistant Secretary of Labor in the Kennedy administration, Assistant for Urban affairs under Richard Nixon, and later senator for New York) pointed out, "the poor were put on the agenda by reformers, not by themselves."⁶ Moynihan suggested that because of the steady economic growth of the period (GNP grew from \$503 billion in 1960 to \$807 billion in 1967), the economy needed large injections of spending to stay buoyant.

The idea of fiscal drag appeared, whose advocates claimed that unless the revenue increment of the government was immediately returned to the economy, it would have a

depressing effect. "This, in a word, was money you had to spend in order to get," noted Moynihan.⁷ There was no shortage of ideas about where the money should be spent, and funds were available for the alleviation of urban poverty if appropriate methods were approved by the government. The HEW was enthusiastic about CAPs, and the Bureau of the Budget also believed they offered greater scope to monitor what was happening on the ground, and preferred the CAP ideas on spending to those where funds were tumbled about in a massive bureaucracy.

However, the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963 affected the progress and development of the CAP plan. President Kennedy's death had many ramifications, including considerable pressure on the new President to produce a legislative record of his own on which to campaign in the 1964 election. Johnson decided that such a package, aimed at the problem of poverty, offered the best potential in terms of short-term gains.

The new President had less than a year in which to make an impact, and so quick, high-profile returns were emphasised in the legislation he proposed. Johnson recalled the frantic pace of those early months in office in his memoirs. "[Sargent] Shriver took over directorship of the poverty program on February 1 1964. I told him he would have to work fast. Not only did I want to propel a program through the Congress immediately but I wanted to produce visible results.... Only six weeks after the task force had first assembled, the program was ready to go. On March 16 I approved it and sent it to Congress."⁸

Many of the proposals, which became the War on Poverty, were produced in a hurry. Much of the programme was rushed and ill-researched. The CAP idea, although fashionable in some circles, lost some of its attraction when the new administration realised that it was a medium-term project, taking several years to show benefits. Moreover, it was regarded by many as a Kennedy idea, championed by the previous President's HEW.

According to Moynihan, when Johnson heard that the CAP would not start to work before the 1964 election as under Shriver's proposal each project would be given 12 months to make a formal application for funds, the President lost interest in the plans. Instead, provisions which promised quicker results were concentrated on by the White House, including employment programmes for the elderly, loans for college students and lighting provisions for schools.

Although there is no reason to believe that Johnson was against the idea in principle, the CAP plan clearly did not serve his immediate purposes, and had Robert Kennedy not lobbied for it so vigorously, it might not have been included in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 at all. In the Congressional hearings on the legislative package, Robert Kennedy was the only administration official to refer to the HEW/Ford Foundation idea of "maximum feasible participation" by the poor. The rest of the debate on Johnson's Economic Opportunity Act centred on funding for parochial schools and whether the measures would be seen to be working by the November election.

Years later, when much of the programme was regarded as

a failure, Moynihan wrote: "Congress... wanted action without too much forethought, preparation, planning, negotiating, agreeing, staging. That is what it got."⁹

The War on Poverty dominated the political agenda until it was overtaken by Vietnam. Many blamed the war against the Viet Cong for its downfall, and claimed that the funds for domestic legislation went to pay for weapons in Asia, and there is no doubt that without the foreign war more resources would have been available for America's cities. However, financing was only one of the problems faced by the War on Poverty. It was also seen as unco-ordinated and inefficient, and was accused of being little more than an election ploy for victory in 1964, and a hugely inflated, short-term public relations campaign run by the White House.

It did have its successes, however, and some poor people undoubtedly benefited from its programmes, but as the decade wore on, it became clear that the CAP idea, although theoretically a good one, was not working. In 1965, for example, there were 16 million households with income below the poverty line. Over two-thirds received some assistance from government programmes, lifting 4.7 million above the poverty line, but a hard-core underclass remained untouched.¹⁰

By 1965, Robert Kennedy's immediate concerns had shifted from those of federal law enforcement to provisions for his New York constituents, and to the development of a national following which might offer him the chance to return to the White House as President. Already associated with the idea of maximum feasible participation by the poor, Kennedy never

fully abandoned it. Later in his Senate career, he refined it, advocating a much greater role for private enterprise, when many liberal politicians were just only beginning to grasp its original principles. By the time of Kennedy's death, "Community action was an idea that came more and more to be associated with Robert Kennedy, even as he grew further from the centers of power in Washington where... its official fate was determined," wrote Moynihan in 1969.¹¹

Apart from Vietnam, Kennedy's major differences with the centres of power in Washington during the period from 1964 to 1968 focused on the urban crisis, and the best ways to move forward in fighting poverty. The CAP, like Robert Kennedy, soon spun out of White House control and in time both became symbolic of how out of touch the administration was with the problem of poverty.

Those in HEW who had conceived of maximum feasible participation were probably as surprised as everybody else at what they had created. In fact, had Kennedy been told in 1964 how radical some of the projects would become, he might not have endorsed it, but as his political thought developed in the Senate, he was called for their extension and personally helped develop a CAP in New York.

Problems with community action were largely rooted in gaps in perception between poor communities and Washington. Both wanted the alleviation of poverty, but neither knew how best to bring it about. Moynihan, an early critic of the plans, recalled: "At that time [1964] I began to feel that official Washington had an entirely different, almost

antithetical, view of the style and function of 'community action' from that of its proponents in the field, and that the intermediaries who had transmitted the idea, were either unaware of this discrepancy, or if not aware not perhaps entirely candid about it."¹²

The execution of the plans sometimes bordered on the farcical, and federal funds went to fund all sorts of local projects. Money often went to groups which needed it least. The most articulate groups bidding for grants were most likely to get it, and federal understanding of local needs in apportioning funds was often minimal.

Those in Washington who had first proposed the idea (including Kennedy) had intended that it should be a tool of integration. However, peaceful integration was the last thing wanted by some of the groups Washington ended up funding. Bobby Seale, later to become a Black Panther official, was on CAP payroll in Oakland in 1966. He remembered, in an essay called "Using the Poverty Program", how he used the money to raise black consciousness (again, not a top priority for those who had originally lobbied for the bill, but one which Robert Kennedy came to appreciate during his time as senator).¹³

"One of the things that hurt the poverty program was that they were always trying to do things by pulling that authoritarian stuff. They were citing the Marquis of Queensbury's rules and stuff like that.... Most of the brothers were from the streets. They wanted to be slick, they wanted to be pimps....," said Seale.¹⁴

Instead of increasing respect for the government, the War

on Poverty was often regarded as tokenism by many in the inner cities ("We don't want a war on poverty," said Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver. "What we want is a war on the rich."¹⁵) Funding for local groups also coincided with the rise of black separatism in many urban centres, which attacked conventional ideas of integration, and so worked against the original aims of the HEW and the Economic Opportunity Act. Some officials in Washington must have thought they had created a monster.

Soon after the CAP plan was up and running, Jack Conway became chairman. A radical union leader who had been working at the AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington, he expanded the idea of "maximum feasible participation" to its maximum feasible limits. He advocated grass-roots action, newsletters, local political leaders, the poor "forming their own institutions".¹⁶

Adam Yarmolinsky, Shriver's former deputy at the Office of Economic Opportunity, which was to supervise CAP projects, recounted how those who had devised the plan of local input had "no intention of getting the poor to think of themselves as a political force. It did not occur to us, and it did not occur to any of the highly professional politicians we consulted."¹⁷

Money was given to inappropriate groups for inappropriate activities. "The government simply didn't know what it was doing," confessed Moynihan.¹⁸ Previous generations of ethnic groups had managed to use the local political system to their advantage, but New Deal measures which were intended to empower the poor and eradicate corruption in local

government served to break up the system of bossism.

For all its faults, the boss system represented ethnic groups very efficiently in many cities. During the 1960s, Adam Clayton Powell of Harlem insisted he should be allowed to appoint the police commissioner of his local district - one who would not harass his black constituents. In an earlier age, he probably would have had the power to do so, but reformers swept out much of the power of patronage of City Hall just as blacks were on the verge of taking their turn in operating it.

The Kerner Commission, set up by the President in the wake of the 1967 riots to investigate the urban problem, found that every riot studied started with a grievance against the local City Hall, from which the local black community felt alienated. If a black Skeffington had been around, it seemed to suggest, many of the problems of local empowerment might have been resolved. "It is plain that the negro ghetto resident feels deeply that he is not represented fairly and adequately under the arrangements which prevail in many cities," noted the Commission.¹⁹

However, by the mid-60s, it was rather late to turn back the clock on the New Deal, or even on the CAP idea, which despite advocating community participation, envisaged it on a federal to street level, which often by-passed the local political machinery.

Moreover, it also had not adequately considered the question of jobs. Little planning seems to have gone into how employment programmes should be set up, what sort of jobs were appropriate, and who should pay for them. A

company set up in Watts with federal help in 1966, clearly prompted by riots in the city a year before, "was formed in such a hurry that it incorporated and hired a black president and general manager before anyone decided what it would produce."²⁰

Eventually the company was awarded a large federal contract, from the Defense Department. Although the company soon appeared to falter in its production of military tents, it was ironically saved by the expansion of the war in Vietnam. Kennedy's criticism of the War on Poverty focused partly on the dependence on federal contracts to create employment in the ghetto, and he proposed a greater involvement of the private sector in job creation schemes.

Kennedy's plans represented a significant break with the Johnson administration and proved sufficiently different from traditional methods of fighting poverty for him to convince many voters in the 1968 presidential primaries (not least blacks) that he was offering something genuinely new in dealing with urban unrest. This departure was based mostly on his Urban Employment and Urban Housing & Development Bills of 1967, and on his record in helping to rejuvenate the Bedford Stuyvesant ghetto with funds from the private sector.

Under Kennedy's proposals, the economic encouragement to private investors would take the shape of lucrative tax breaks, and intended to involve the local municipality. Under the legislation for employment, for example, he suggested that a business wishing to locate in a low-income area would have to gain approval from the municipality and

from the residents of the area itself. It would be required to hire a minimum of 20 people, two-thirds of whom would be either poverty-area residents or low-income individuals.

In return for participating, a business would be offered a 10% credit on machinery and equipment (an increase of 3% of what was permitted at the time), a 7% credit on costs of constructing a facility of leasing space (none was offered at the time) and a 25% deduction of salaries paid to workers hired to meet the requirements of the bill (no help was given in this situation at the time). Other methods had been tried in an attempt to attract industry to the ghetto, and Kennedy warned big business that if conditions in the inner cities did not improve, the long-term risks to capitalism were substantial.

However, this approach appeared to have little impact on executives who were more interested in short-term economic gains than the larger threat to the fabric of society which might destroy their company in a generation or two. The tax break scheme designed to encourage business into the ghetto was an important ideological departure from previous proposals, including some Kennedy had sponsored.

In his first year as senator, he had joined with other orthodox liberals like Walter Mondale, Eugene McCarthy and George McGovern in sponsoring a bill "to provide grants for public works...to alleviate conditions of substantial and persistent unemployment", and co-sponsored a bill to set up a Department of Housing and Urban Development, which was an old-style tentacle of the federal government.²¹

In January 1966, he proposed that a series of "new towns"

be established outside the most deprived cities, where at least 15% of residents would be black, who could afford to pay for their accommodation through a series of federal subsidies disbursed by the new government department.²² The proposal also sought to provide money to bus inner-city blacks to schools in these new towns, and so force the pace of integration.

His 1967 ideas on attracting business money were a good deal more imaginative than his previous efforts, and he also began to appreciate what local participation might entail. "Community action is going to be directed against the establishment. That means it is going to be directed against us," he noted.²³ His shift in emphasis on funding proved even more significant. "The lack of private enterprise participation is the principal cause of our failure to solve the problem of employment in urban poverty areas," he declared in 1967.²⁴

The federal approach had not been sufficiently efficient to combat the problem, Kennedy suggested, and he criticised this single-weapon approach for being particularly inefficient in building suitable housing. He criticised federal efforts at improving the situation: "In its 30 years of operation, the public housing program has completed only 639,000 units, ... [and while] the building of luxury housing in the city has been assisted by favourable treatment in the Internal Revenue Code...similar assistance has not been available for low-cost housing in the slums."²⁵

Through a series of tax incentives to businesses, including home building loans set at 2%, Kennedy wanted to

"produce two- and three-bedroom units that will rent for under \$100 a month". To involve the private sector was not Kennedy's idea, and not a particularly new one. The Housing Act of 1949, sponsored by Senator Taft, had encouraged greater private participation in slum clearance projects. The private sector had historically played a major part in the development of America, and from the large railroad companies of the Nineteenth Century to those firms who earned contracts in the space programme of the 1960s, the sector had taken on major responsibilities in modernising the United States.

However, Kennedy was among the first politicians, certainly from the Democratic Party, who advocated what became known as "neo-conservatism". Kennedy's proposals of 1967, which drew on traditional Republican elements of private funding, together with his experience on the HEW committee, and his representation of New York in the Senate, were taken up by others, including the Kerner Commission and, to some extent, the Johnson administration. In his State of the Union address to Congress in January 1967, the President called for "a new partnership between government and private industry to train and to hire the hard-core unemployed persons".²⁶

Nevertheless, what the President had in mind was markedly different from the Kennedy proposals, which regarded private business involvement as a long-term prospect, with the major corporations of America investing generations of resources into the cities. By 1968, sociologist Kenneth B. Clark agreed that "business and industry are our last hope".²⁷ In

a curious change of direction for radical liberals at the time, it was those on the left of the progressive movements who were championing free enterprise, while the moderates stuck by the old federal approach. The debate was not only exemplified by the differences between Kennedy and Johnson camps over how much scope should be given to private enterprise.

The discussion was not a new one, and the federal/local dichotomy had shaped the American Constitution, its party system and its Civil War. However, for the first time in several generations, it surfaced on the left of the Democratic Party, which hitherto had been bound by a consensus of federal intervention, as realised in the shape of the New Deal.

By the mid-60s, as the New Deal electoral coalition was beginning to show signs of strain, so too did its philosophy of central government funding. Kennedy, despite his ties to the old school, was among the first on the left to call for its replacement. The debate was also being aired in forums other than the Democratic Party. Martin Luther King aide Andrew Young recalls how King was "quite rough on Jesse [Jackson]" for putting too much emphasis on the private sector in improving conditions in ghettos.²⁸

King, according to Young, insisted that "jobs would finally have to be provided by the public sector rather than the private sector, and that [Operation Breadbasket] was essentially a private sector program." Operation Breadbasket was a food relief programme for low-income urban areas. After King's death, when Jackson encountered less resistance

to his private enterprise proposals, the thrust of Breadbasket shifted from employment to black capitalism. One study noted how "Jackson sought to induce the mighty corporations to buy from, bank with, and invest in black-owned businesses. Blacks should develop their own 'private economy' he insisted; they needed a 'capital base in the black community.'"²⁹ Apart from the ideological attraction to Kennedy in pioneering a new, radical thrust in urban policy, there was also the question of cost.

With the Vietnam war threatening to go on indefinitely, the federal government wasn't capable of keeping the promises of the earlier years, when money was apparently no object in the relief of poverty. Although many criticised the way money had spent in those early days of the Economic Opportunity Act, they were now beginning to worry that the money would not be available at all. I.F. Stone's Weekly had noted in April 1966 that "although 650 CAPs are now in operation, barely 10% of the nation's poor have been reached. In spite of this, the OEO has recommended that program development funds...be cut from \$18m to \$6m".³⁰

Civil rights leaders who met with Kennedy that year proposed a domestic Marshall Plan to "solve poverty", which would cost \$100 billion, but with the war in Vietnam costing \$2 billion a month, he told them that no such figure was likely to be appropriated in the near future. "If the Vietnam war ends, maybe in five years we can think in those terms," he said.³¹

Part of Kennedy's credibility of the private enterprise proposals was staked on the success of his experiment at

Bedford Stuyvesant, an especially poor ghetto in New York. The project was considered by Kennedy to be a prototype for community rehabilitation, and thanks largely to his personal involvement and contacts, it flourished in its first years.

By 1968, a community hall was being successfully rebuilt, over 300 homes had been renovated, IBM was planning to create 300 jobs in the area and several local businesses were expanding. Eighty banks and insurance companies, which had only previously provided money in black areas under the strictest conditions, agreed to offer conventional rate mortgages guaranteed by the Federal Housing Administration. Newsweek described it as "the most sweeping and comprehensive rehabilitation effort ever brought to bear on a single American community".³²

The project succeeded where others failed partly because it had been properly worked out in advance, partly because it was paid for with large injections of cash from the private sector, which gave the project a certain dynamism government projects had lacked, and partly because Kennedy's personal involvement ensured it enjoyed a status which lesser-known projects lacked. Compared with other schemes of its kind, for example one set up in the Roxbury area of Boston, the Bedford Stuyvesant plan was well thought out and properly planned.

In March 1968, EG&G, a major nuclear research corporation, opened a metal fabricating plant in Roxbury, and a study of business in the ghetto compared its success with that of Kennedy's New York scheme. EG&G was not only inexperienced in light metal fabrication, but it proceeded

to hire a group of disadvantaged workers and four black managers, all of whom were totally unfamiliar with such operations.

EG&G had little internal demand for such metal products, so outside markets had to be cultivated, which the company found almost impossible to find. The inexperience of the workers and managers meant that overheads ran at about three times wages - whereas under normal conditions they would be about a half. Despite a \$575,000 training grant from the Labor Department, the plant lost \$75,000 in 1968, and was forced to lose two of its four black managers.³³

The Watts-based company, which was only saved by the escalation of the Vietnam War, had encountered similar problems, as it found its training costs to be nearer \$5,000 per worker than the \$1,300 provided by the Labor Department. Two years after its inception, one of its executives reported: "There was a lot of flag waving in the beginning, but when the hurrahs died down, we were caught in the middle of it." IBM's involvement in Bedford Stuyvesant, on the other hand, is still prospering today. Beginning operations in July 1968, it originally produced computer cables for IBM, but this proved unprofitable. The plant gradually shifted to producing power supplies, which it was able to do at less than outside vendor costs (though still more expensively than at other IBM plants).

IBM succeeded where others failed because it consciously underplayed its goals to the public to begin with, and did not go in for the fanfare which heralded other business entries into ghettos. It also produced for an internal and

guaranteed market: the demand was known and only the question of supply remained to be worked out. The project depended on more than just IBM, of course, and two organisations were set up to monitor the rebuilding of the ghetto.

The Restoration Corporation represented the residents of the local community and was responsible for the development and implementation of programmes, whereas the Bedford Stuyvesant Development and Services Corporation was established to represent the business community. In 1973, the two organisations merged to create the single corporation which now runs the project. In its first 15 years of operation, the project in the ghetto received 25% of its funding directly from government, 15% from business subsidiary income, 20% from mortgage and loan financing, 18% from rent, 11% from special contributions and grants, and the rest it generated from other projects.³⁴.

If there had not been so much pressure on the community action programmes to work so quickly, and had they been given sufficient time to be properly researched and developed, more projects might have enjoyed the benefits which were afforded to Bedford Stuyvesant. Moreover, if the large corporations could have been attracted into the ghettos through a series of economic incentives, parent companies might have taken over from the government in providing many necessary services.

These might not necessarily have been any more efficient in providing long-term job prospects, but in some ways they were more stable than government agencies, whose funding

could appear and disappear as regularly as there were elections. Kennedy's plans for the ghetto were not revolutionary, but he did help to pioneer ideas which were only realised some years after his death, mostly through the neo-conservatism of Moynihan in the Nixon White House, when business was encouraged to play a greater role, and where more planning was required before a community was awarded government money.

In fact much of Kennedy's community bias was echoed in Nixon's urban policy, which discouraged the federal government's participation in renewal programmes. Kennedy may not have been ready to go as far as Nixon, who preferred awarding block grants to local mayors to allocate money to specific projects in their cities, but it would not be stretching the parallel too far to submit that Nixon's neo-conservatism was, in some ways, Kennedy's legacy.

These principles of private funding and local control have grown in strength since they were proposed by Kennedy, and have often been cited by politicians on the right as sensible approaches to the alleviation of poverty. In the early 1980s, they were commended to by Peter Walker, then a British cabinet minister in the Conservative government and later head of the country's Urban Regeneration Agency.

He suggested that Bobby Kennedy was acting in the tradition of former British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan in advocating "The Middle Way". "Bobby Kennedy...drew attention to the powerful role that free enterprise needs to play in tackling the urban problem. He wanted private enterprise to have the ingenuity to provide decent

housing....He recognised that welfare wrongly applied would destroy self-respect and encourage family disintegration".³⁵

In the early 1990s, the Bush administration also appeared to be reverting to Kennedy's ideas of the mid-1960s to fight American poverty. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Jack Kemp suggested a cut in capital gains tax for those investing in the inner cities, and an expansion in inner city home ownership -both plans pioneered by Kennedy during his Senate career.³⁶. In recent years, these tax incentives for inner cities have become known as "enterprise zone" schemes.

Whether the enterprise zone idea proves ultimately successful remains to be seen. So far, these ideas have failed to stem the drug trade or the increase in violent crime. That Robert Kennedy's ideas have not achieved total victory in the war against poverty does not mean they have not made a significant contribution. They were new approaches to historic problems, and Kennedy should at least be credited with being far ahead of his colleagues in his proposals for inner-city renewal.

During the major disturbances in Los Angeles in early 1992, sparked by the acquittal of four white policemen charged with assaulting a black man, the two gangs which control much of the city drew up a truce and an economic plan for the future of their community. It demanded that private companies be forced to invest in the area. IBM, for instance, were asked to provide ten computers and three staff members. In return, 30 gang members would be trained as computer operators and repairmen. Computer manufacturers

Apple and Micro were asked to train young blacks as software writers.

"We demand that welfare be completely removed from our community," declared the gangs, "and these welfare programmes be replaced by state work and product manufacturing plants that provide the city with certain supplies. State money shall only be provided for invalids and the elderly."³⁷ The demands echo Kennedy's ideas for Bedford Stuyvesant, which appear to have been two decades ahead of their time.

There is no denying that Kennedy was particularly sensitive to black aspirations, and his popularity among black voters was remarkable. His support from their leaders was often less enthusiastic, who were worried by his previous involvement with FBI surveillance of Martin Luther King and his initially lukewarm response to civil-rights activists in the early 1960s. Nevertheless, his popularity with the majority of blacks was undoubted. How much of this support came from his legislative proposals, how much from his past relationship with President Kennedy, and how much from his glamorous image, is impossible to quantify.

Just as he was more advanced than most other politicians in the policies he proposed, so too was he more aware of the developments in black political thinking than nearly all of his fellow Congressmen. He was familiar with ideas of separatism and black consciousness years before many other liberals appreciated the principles, and his electoral success in black areas was bettered by no comparable candidate.

His first exposure to black consciousness came as early as 1963, when he met James Baldwin and other prominent black leaders shortly before the March on Washington. Kennedy felt he had no reason to be ashamed of what his brother's administration had done for civil rights, but this record carried little weight in his New York meeting, and he was met with a barrage of criticism from those who thought the President had not done enough to recognise the difficulties being experienced by urban blacks at the time.

It was, by several accounts, the first time Kennedy had encountered the idea of black consciousness first-hand.³⁸ The playwright Lorraine Hansberry launched a virulent attack on the administration, warned of gun battles in the street, and introduced notions like black separatism to the Attorney General. Kennedy was shocked by the verbal assaults, and largely ignorant of the blacks' motives in criticising him. In an oral history programme recorded in 1964, he told the interviewer that "A number of them...have complexes about the fact that they've been successful. I mean, that they've done so well...so the way to show that they hadn't forgotten where they came from was to berate me and berate the United States government."³⁹

He also questioned the credentials of the blacks he met to speak on behalf of others. "They didn't really know, with a few exceptions, any of the facts. James Baldwin couldn't discuss any legislation, for instance, on housing or any of these matters. He didn't know anything about them. Harry Belafonte said afterwards - and he was right - that it was a mistake having them there because they didn't know

anything."

Kennedy's position as senator from New York, which had one of the most militantly black separatist traditions in the country, also exposed him to some of the most radical blacks of the time. (According to Tom Hayden, "Kennedy met with [militant CORE leader] Floyd McKissick and continually gave him money.")⁴⁰

Assigned to the committee on Labor & Public Welfare, and to the committee on Washington DC, his working day involved as much exposure to the problems faced by the urban poor as any other national legislator.

He was also an assiduous constituency senator. Having won a Senate campaign where he had been attacked for being an outsider from Massachusetts, Kennedy immediately expanded his Senate staff so that it soon became the largest in Congress. On entering the Senate in January 1965, he is recorded as having 20 administrative staff on the payroll. Within six months, 36 more had joined, making a total of 56 - appreciably larger than the staffs of either his brother (who had 23), other Senate newcomers like Walter Mondale (who had 26), or even New York's senior senator, Jacob Javits, who had 38 staff members. By 1968, Kennedy's Senate staff was by far the largest in Congress, numbering 70 (Ted Kennedy's and Javits' remained at about 1965 levels, while Mondale's had dropped to 16).⁴¹

With such resources (a senator was given a certain allowance by the government, which he could augment from his own pocket), Kennedy proved a competent, if unprolific, legislator, and earned a reputation for keeping in close

touch with his constituents. He was the first senator from New York to run an upstate office, and the "carpetbagger" charges were soon dropped (in fact Kennedy had been born in New York, although had left it as a child). Although he never favoured the approach of separatists like Malcolm X over the integrationist views of, for instance, Martin Luther King, Kennedy was aware that lifting the legal obstacles to equal opportunity and voting rights was not enough. "You may remember that when the Civil Rights Act went into effect, Mississippi civil rights workers had to go to great lengths to ensure that all negroes who tested the law had enough money to pay for a single cup of coffee," he told the Senate in a remark which challenged the liberal consensus based on Myrdal's analysis that the issue was primarily a moral one.⁴²

Once he had accepted that substantial economic independence was a prerequisite for real black emancipation, it was a short step for him to concede that other disadvantages experienced by the black community might also have to be dealt with before real integration could begin. There was nothing new in this, of course. Malcolm X had been saying it for years before, and Frantz Fanon had been saying it years before him. Nevertheless, Kennedy spotted the political potential of Black Power before any other major white politician (and a whole decade before the rise of Steve Biko and black consciousness in South Africa). "Blackness", he said, "must be made a badge of pride and honour".⁴³

Probably only Edmund Brooke, a black senator from

Massachusetts, rivalled Kennedy in Congress for his appreciation of the phenomena, and his major statement on the issue did not appear until July 1967. "Black Power is, more than a slogan, an idea with very many promising uses for negroes and for the country generally....If the idea of Black Power assists the internal organisation of political strength in the negro slums, then it will have served a very useful national purpose indeed," said Brooke.⁴⁴

Black Power, coined in October 1966 as a political slogan by Stokely Carmichael, was an effectively vague phrase which was used to suggest varying degrees of self-determination, from revolution to cultural pride. Kennedy's idea to develop Bedford Stuyvesant was one manifestation of Black Power, as local blacks were to be awarded an unprecedented measure of self-determination. But it was not without its paradoxes. The power could not be said to have been genuinely black if it had been granted (and could be withheld) by white money and white enthusiasm.

Moreover, Kennedy's project was only viable with a certain kind of pliable local leadership. According to former Kennedy staffers, Bedford Stuyvesant was chosen over Harlem because the local black leadership in Harlem was too developed to allow for such outside initiatives. Harlem was declared unsuitable because of its "highly structured political leadership, the strong influence of the militant anti-white groups which would create barriers, as would his own arm's length relationship with Adam Clayton Powell, who was at the time chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee," conceded members of Kennedy's Senate staff.⁴⁵

Bedford Stuyvesant, on the other hand, was eminently appropriate partly because "...it had no congressman of its own, its borders having been cut up and distributed between three congressional districts, [and]...no dominant negro leaders".⁴⁶ When some locals did object to Kennedy's plans for the ghetto, they were co-opted into the scheme, just as radical blacks had been co-opted into the March on Washington. (In the oral history programme, Kennedy recalls how the administration was concerned about communist infiltration in the March, and stopped an official from the Committee on Racial Equality from delivering an "inflammatory speech" because it was "an attack on the country. It attacked the President"⁴⁷.) "At one point, some of the neighbourhood groups threatened to discredit the project, but Kennedy...turned them back by broadening the membership of the community corporations to include younger and more militant elements," recalled the Senate aides.⁴⁸

However, the Bedford Stuyvesant project did complement the notion of black assertiveness. "In the long run, it is only by a rebuilding process of which physical reconstruction is part, that we can achieve the comparability of housing which is an independent requirement of full integration," he declared to Congress.⁴⁹ The ultimate aim was still one of integration, but from a position of black strength, but this point proved too sophisticated for some of his most liberal colleagues in the Senate.

McCarthy was against it, and by 1985 had still not grasped the implications of the idea. "He [Kennedy] was really for apartheid; 'keep 'em in lots' was in effect what

he was saying. I was saying that you had to have physical integration....He was big on Bedford Stuyvesant, which was segregated residential apartheid. There was even talk of putting industry in Watts - some[one] proposed to build a factory making baseball bats. Baseball bats! - the last thing you'd need in Watts. Perhaps pillows..."⁵⁰

McCarthy was not the only one who was confused about the project's philosophy. John Bartlow Martin was an important figure in the Kennedy campaign. He had known Robert Kennedy since the 1950s, when he covered the union hearings as a journalist. After campaigning for JFK in 1960, he was rewarded with an ambassadorship to the Dominican Republic.

In 1968, Robert Kennedy asked him to organise his presidential campaign in Martin's native Indiana. Charged with the responsibility of encouraging black support in places like Indianapolis, Martin relied primarily on Kennedy's record as Attorney General rather than his new enthusiasm for black consciousness. "He talked about that [Bedford Stuyvesant] endlessly," recalled Martin in 1985. "I couldn't make head or tail of it. I didn't understand it. I remember talking to him early on in the campaign. He went on about Bedford Stuyvesant and I was bored...I didn't listen to that. I just literally didn't understand it."⁵¹

It is difficult to judge if Kennedy himself really understood the limitations of his position as a white liberal in such a project. "If I could do what I really wanted to do, I would resign from the Senate and run Bedford Stuyvesant," he said in 1967, apparently missing the essential point that part of the project's *raison d'être* was

that it would not be run by outsiders, especially white ones.⁵²

Whatever his understanding of the principles involved, there is no doubting Kennedy's genuine popularity in the ghettos. In an immediate reaction to the death of President Kennedy, black Moslem leader Elijah Mohammed forbade public discussion of the assassination in case it offended blacks who idolised JFK. Within a week of the killing, however, Malcolm X addressed a black Islamic service at Temple Seven in New York, and referred to President Kennedy as a segregationist and to the Kennedys (John, Robert and Edward) as the KKK. The congregation, according to reports, left disappointed, unenthusiastic about Malcolm X's attack on the Kennedys.⁵³

It has been suggested that some of Robert Kennedy's popularity with blacks relied on his anti-war position, as money spent on the war effort in Vietnam could otherwise be used to improve inner-city areas. Although the war hit ghetto communities severely, it does not appear that by the time of Kennedy's death the war was a major concern of black voters. Martin and McCarthy saw the issues as distinctly separate, and there is little record of candidates emphasising their dovish war voting records in black areas.

In 1966, Kennedy made a much-publicised trip to South Africa, where he spoke out against racial injustice and met banned Nobel prize winner Albert Luthuli. There is little evidence that American blacks were especially drawn to him because of this sort of stand, although just as his brother's speech in 1957 calling for Algerian independence

was probably not significant in attracting black support 1960 it may have had little electoral impact.

According to McCarthy, "blacks didn't know what [Kennedy] was saying and they didn't care anyway".⁵⁴ Kennedy's phenomenal popularity in black areas did not necessarily reflect his views on the war, or even his sensitivity to the emergence of Black Power. It could simply have been glamour or charisma. According to most authoritative studies of charisma, charismatic leaders (ie those who are perceived to have extraordinary abilities or supernatural talents) emerge at times of great change or confusion.

By the mid-60s in America, there is little doubt that many perceived the social situation to be critical, and a crop of charismatic leaders surfaced. John Lindsay, Ronald Reagan, George Wallace, Martin Luther King and Barry Goldwater all emerged from mainstream politics at this time offering strong and attractive leadership, while the fringes produced Bobby Seale, Malcolm X and Tom Hayden.

How the unlikable and unglamorous Bobby Kennedy of the early '60s became the most worshipped of these figures (even to the point of messianic reverence) is still unclear, although according to the classic study of charisma produced by Max Weber earlier this century, charisma can be "transferred" from one charismatic leader to a nominated successor, often "to the kinsmen of its bearer...this is the case of hereditary charisma".⁵⁵ Assuming that some of Robert Kennedy's appeal came from his relationship to John Kennedy, it is conceivable that Bobby Kennedy's charisma was "inherited" in this way.

In a more recent study of the charismatic appeal of Jesse Jackson, the author contends that "it is critical for charismatic figures to become attached to the primary myths of the culture....Thus John F. Kennedy, a glamorous but hardly charismatic figure for most Americans, became a charismatic figure after his assassination by being assimilated to the Lincoln myth".⁵⁶ (The author describes how Jesse Jackson tried to align himself to the myth of Martin Luther King immediately after he was assassinated by wearing a shirt on television which had apparently been stained with King's blood.)

Thus Robert Kennedy, more directly associated with President Kennedy than either his other brother or JFK's officially designated successor, Lyndon Johnson, might have benefited from the transference of charisma.

A lieutenant of Martin Luther King during the 1960s and now the Congressman for Washington DC, Walter Fauntroy, supports this suggestion. Kennedy's popularity among blacks, he says, was partly rooted in "the feeling that his brother was assassinated for the forthright stand he was moved to take in 1963 around the Birmingham movement...and at a subliminal level, blacks felt that for whatever reasons he was killed, among them was his forthrightness on the question of civil rights....There was a desire to reward [Robert Kennedy] with what the people would've rewarded his brother had he lived".⁵⁷

Certainly, the Kennedy presidential campaign of 1968 felt confident enough to leave out a great deal of political substance during his appearances in ghettos, preferring to

rely more on the simple pull of his presence. His campaign manager, Fred Dutton, believed that "blacks need a high-intensity, high-visibility style of campaigning (so do blue-collar whites, but not as much). We made an intentional pitch to the blacks and made the most out of dramatic situations."⁵⁸

Kennedy himself, it would appear, was not beyond making dramatic statements in private to black leaders during the campaign. At Martin Luther King's funeral, he told Walter Fauntroy in a private conversation that "there are guns between me and the White House".⁵⁹

A rough "line of descent" appeared to emerge in popular culture in the months after Robert Kennedy's assassination, as a Motown song, "Abraham, Martin and John" - which reached number four in the US charts of November 1968 - grouped Bobby Kennedy with fallen heroes Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy, and Martin Luther King. Kennedy's links with popular black culture did not end there. Musician James Brown "had just about decided to endorse Senator Robert Kennedy" when he was assassinated, and Diana Ross and The Supremes played a \$1,000 a plate fundraiser/concert in April 1969, the proceeds of which towards paying off Kennedy's campaign debts. In June 1971, Motown subsidiary Mowest released "What The World Needs Now Is Love" where the lyrics were interspersed with extracts of speeches from King and John and Robert Kennedy.⁶⁰

The line of descent appears to have been enlarged, but Robert Kennedy is still part of it. Addressing the 1984 Democratic Convention in San Francisco, Jesse Jackson

referred to the achievements of the civil rights movement in the 1960s: "We lost Malcolm, Martin, Medgar, Bobby and John and Viola. The team that got us here must be expanded, not abandoned".⁶¹ Whatever Kennedy's real place in black culture, he appears to have joined the pantheon of black heroes and heroines credited with black progress.

Kennedy was primarily concerned, of course, with how far this affection translated into electoral support. He swept ghetto areas in the presidential primaries with overwhelming majorities (and only lost in Oregon, which was virtually ghetto-free). In fact, Kennedy's popularity in the ghettos threatened to damage his image with suspicious white voters. The urban response to Kennedy was often overwhelming.

While McCarthy stayed away from ghettos because he "didn't want to stir them up",⁶² McGovern recalls how he "would watch the nightly news and you'd see these largely youthful, black, poor crowds crushing around him and it frightened a lot of people. The majority may not have been quite ready for Robert Kennedy in 1968."⁶³

John Bartlow Martin had similar memories of organising Kennedy's primary campaign in Indiana. "I remember he was at Monument Circle in Indianapolis and he got a crowd there such as I've never seen. I've seen Eisenhower's crowds there and Stevenson's and I've never seen anything like this....I was scared physically. I fell and broke a tooth and it was just a mess."⁶⁴

The pop-star image of Kennedy in his latter days as a senator proved effective in primary campaigning, especially in low-income areas. Stokely Carmichael had complained to a

Kennedy aide about the candidate's popularity: "I would not want to see your man run for president because he can get the votes of my people without coming to me. With the other candidates, I'll have bargaining power."⁶⁵ Even Eldridge Cleaver, one of the most militant black leaders and a Black Panther official, described Kennedy's performance at a Senate hearing in 1967 with reticent respect, before dismissing him as "too white to be all right". "He wore the aura of an idol-smasher. He was the bad boy on the committee, the only one who contained the potential in his image to ask the scandalous questions.... The other two members of the committee...bore no promise..." wrote Cleaver.⁶⁶

Moderate black leaders also respected him much more in these years. In the summer of 1967, King suggested that Kennedy would "make a great President" (although he says he doesn't believe Kennedy could win the nomination from Johnson).⁶⁷ NAACP leader Roy Wilkins also conceded that "When Sirhan Sirhan shot Bobby Kennedy in Los Angeles, I came as close as I ever have come to losing faith in the workings of democracy. I had always felt a degree of distance from Bobby Kennedy, partly because he had become senator in New York by defeating Kenneth Keating, a Republican who had always been a very good friend of the NAACP. But the older Bobby grew, the more clear matters of race relations became to him. By 1968 he obviously felt the problem deeply, and he was poised to offer considerable help."⁶⁸

Ironically, Kennedy's popularity with blacks suggested to many that he could also be a popular figure among low-

income whites, and a popular theory expounded in the press suggested that Kennedy was the first choice of many who eventually voted for George Wallace in 1968.

On the night of King's assassination in April 1968, John Bartlow Martin was due to meet Kennedy at Indianapolis airport. Kennedy was due to open his primary campaign headquarters in the city and attend a rally in the ghetto. While waiting for Kennedy's plane to land, Martin asked a police inspector if the candidate should still attend the rally in light of King's death. The police inspector, according to Martin, replied: "If he doesn't, they'll tear this town apart tonight. He's the only one that can do it." Martin remembered: "The negroes did burn the cities that night, except Indianapolis....Bobby did exactly what the policeman wanted him to do without knowing the policeman wanted it...".⁶⁹ This notion of understanding blacks was certainly one of Kennedy's main attractions among whites, who often believed he could keep blacks under control.

According to Walter Fauntroy, when Kennedy was assassinated, the police authorities in Washington DC deployed extra troops in the areas which had rioted after King's death, believing that blacks in the city might become violent on hearing of another of their leaders murdered. On the outskirts of the city 10,00 soldiers were placed on alert in case Kennedy's death triggered rioting.⁷⁰

One of the areas which the police believed offered potential for violence was around the Lincoln Memorial, which had become home to those who had arrived in Washington at the end of the Poor People's March. The march was

designed to embarrass the government into doing something for the poor of the country, and poor people from all over the nation converged on Washington in 1968, and set up camp near the memorial.

According to NAACP lawyer Marion Wright, the march was Kennedy's idea. "I had told him [in August 1967] that I was going to stop back in Atlanta and see Dr King - he said 'Tell him to bring the poor people to Washington'. And as simply as Bobby Kennedy had said it, King instinctively felt that that was right....Out of that, the Poor People's Campaign was born."⁷⁰

The suggestion was typical. By encouraging thousands of poor people to Washington, Kennedy could ensure that the President was embarrassed on the issue of poverty and claim extra credibility for himself with radical leaders by adopting the mantle of direct (if non-violent) confrontation.

Whether Kennedy's position at the cutting edge of civil rights was anything more than part of a master-plan to recapture the presidency will never be known, and his motivation in embracing some of the most radical ideas of black self-determination is not as important as the fact that he was successful at it.

This radical appeal to blacks self-sufficiency proved a formidable vote-winner, and has not been emulated by a white candidate since.

This chapter has traced Kennedy's shifts in attitude to civil rights. From a weak grasp of civil rights as Attorney

General, Kennedy moved beyond the orthodox liberal Myrdal model to push for Community Action Programmes and to develop projects which would eventually become known as "enterprise zones". By extending tax incentives, private enterprise would be encouraged to invest in the ghettos. Despite mixed success with this idea during the 1960s and later, a few individual projects did work very well, notably Kennedy's urban renewal plans for Bedford-Stuyvesant.

His popularity in the ghettos may not have relied primarily on his vision for renewal, but was apparently based on a charisma inherited from President Kennedy.

NOTES

1. Voting stats from The Crisis magazine, 1965 p29. See also Stern p20-39 on JFK's attitude to civil rights during the 1960 campaign.
2. Schlesinger p234. All references to Schlesinger are taken from Robert Kennedy and His Times (1978) unless otherwise stated. The black best known to John Kennedy at this time was probably George Thomas, who had been his personal butler since the mid-1940s and who served JFK in the White House. Thomas is described by Pierre Salinger (1965) as "a negro of unfailing good humour".
3. RFK: In His Own Words p212
4. RFK Pursuit of Justice p108
5. Moynihan p68: Although Moynihan campaigned for RFK during the California primary, they disagreed over urban policy. Moynihan is now RFK's successor as Senator for New York (Democrat) but after the '68 election worked for Nixon's White House. RFK said of his proposals for urban renewal: "He knows all the facts, and he's against all the solutions."
6. Ibid
7. Ibid
8. Johnson p511
9. Ibid no.5
10. Polenberg p202
11. Ibid no.5 p79
12. Ibid no.5 p84
13. Seale p112

14. Ibid
15. Cleaver p21 (in a piece written on May 10 1967 called "Robert Kennedy's Prison"). Although Kennedy was never popular with the Black Panther leadership, during his California primary campaign in 1968, Black Panthers reportedly cleared the way for his motorcade to progress through crowds to the ghetto in West Oakland (Stein p343)
16. Ibid no.5 p97
17. Ibid no.5 p111
18. Ibid no.5 p95
19. Kerner p490
20. Schuchter p281
21. Congressional Record
22. Ibid
23. RFK: To Seek a Newer World p159
24. Ibid
25. Ibid no.8 p365
26. Ibid no.19 p521
27. Fairclough (JAS April 1988)
28. Ibid
29. Heath p230
30. Stone's Weekly April 12 1966.
31. Ibid no.2 p329. In his New Year Newsletter to constituents, however, Kennedy hinted that both objectives might be pursuable. "Our most urgent question perhaps is whether we must raise taxes to ensure enough resources for the war in Vietnam and for a progressive program at home."
32. Newsweek May 7 1968
33. Ibid no.20

34. Bedford Stuyvesant publicity leaflet 1991
35. Walker p30
36. Guardian 5 May 1992
37. Ibid 30 May 1992
38. Ibid no.3 p235
39. Ibid no.3 p161
40. Stein p393. McKissick, attracted by the White House's ideas on black capitalism, backed Nixon for the presidency in 1972.
41. Ibid no.21. After Kennedy's death, his widow Ethel was paid his salary up to June 6, the day of his death. While other senators received \$15,000 for the first six months of the year, Mrs Kennedy was paid \$12,999.99 plus a one-off payment of \$30,000.
42. Ibid no.21. Speech to Senate chamber.
43. Ibid no.21. Kennedy was uneasy with the Black Power slogan, however, if it implied segregation at the cost of integration. In an interview with the Christian Science Monitor on July 11 1966, RFK said that "Black Power could be damaging not only to the civil-rights movement but to the country.
44. Ibid no.21. Speech to Senate chamber.
45. Vanden Heuvel & Gwirtzman p182
46. Ibid
47. RFK: In His Own Words, p320. Malcolm X, charging that the Kennedy administration had co-opted the March on Washington, referred to it as "the Farce on Washington". He declared that "white liberals took over the March on Washington, weakened its impact, and changed its course; by changing the

participants and the contents, they were able to change the very nature of the march itself".

48. Vanden Heuvel & Gwirtzman p256

49. Ibid no.21. Speech to Senate chamber.

50. Personal interview, May 1985

51. Personal interview, June 1985

52. Ibid no.45

53. Perry p296

54. Ibid no.50

55. Weber p410

56. House p320

57. Personal interview, May 1985

58. Personal interview, May 1985

59. Ibid no.55

60. See Dream Girl - My Life as a Supreme, by Mary Wilson (London 1987) p217; James Brown's The Godfather of Soul (New York 1986) p191 & 195. Black and white artists had hits with "Abraham, Martin and John in the early 1970s, which was written in the months following Robert Kennedy's death. It devotes a verse each to Abraham Lincoln, John Kennedy, Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy. Tom Clancy, the D.J. who included extracts from speeches of the Kennedys and King was white.

Although Lincoln is featured in the Abraham, Martin and John song, the team is usually restricted to the trinity of King and the two Kennedys. On the 20th anniversary of the March on Washington, for example, T-shirts were sold at the Lincoln memorial bearing the images of the three, and there is an oblique reference to the three in Don McLean's

"American Pie" song, who mentions them as "the Father, Son and Holy Ghost". The timing of King's and Robert Kennedy's assassinations - only two months apart - have probably contributed to the popular association. On the tenth anniversary of Robert Kennedy's death, Al Lowenstein (in 1968 a New Left activist who urged Kennedy to run for the presidency and who later became a Congressman) wrote a piece for The Washington Star (June 5 1978) which touched on this. "Perhaps because Robert Kennedy was the last of the three to die, his death seems the cruellest - bearing the cumulative freight of what had gone before, multiplying the doubt that there was any place for hope in a society where the best spokesmen for hope could not survive...with him went the spirit of a generation".

61. Hampton & Fayer, p706. Jackson's list includes several new names to the basic three, and the inclusion of Medgar Evers and Malcolm X are particularly revealing. Both were assassinated during the mid-'60s, but neither have achieved the stature of King or Kennedys in popular culture. The Motown song, for instance, isn't about "Malcolm, Martin and Medgar".

62. Ibid no. 50

63. Ibid no. 57

64. Personal interview, June 1985

65. Fairlie p124

66. Cleaver p22

67. Garrow, p576. On March 25 1968, King said he would settle for either Kennedy or McCarthy as the Democratic nominee. The two were never personally very close, the wiretapping

incident no doubt making such contact difficult. However, Coretta King was invited to join Kennedy's funeral train (and was welcomed aboard by Ethel Kennedy with the words "There's our pal"), and at the time of their deaths their political relationship, at least, had improved from Robert Kennedy's days as Attorney General.

68. Wilkins p330

69. Personal interview June 1985

70. Personal interview May 1985. All police leave in Washington DC was cancelled. The Times of June 7 reported that America was preparing "for what could be called a state of siege", and that The Pentagon had 26,800 men from the California National Guard "ready for deployment in the streets" should violence erupt, and had readied troops "detailed for duty in civil disturbances in various parts of the country". Of course, tension had been heightened by the disturbances ignited in the preceding weeks by the King assassination.

Large-scale violence didn't break out anywhere, although police suspected the murder of an Arab shopkeeper in Chicago on June 10 could have been motivated by revenge for Kennedy's death. The nearest the Poor People's Campaign came to an outbreak of hostility was in the rhetoric of campaign leader Hosea Williams, who charged that "They are trying to kill off all our leaders so that we will be leaderless."

(The Times, June 6)

71. Hampton & Fayer p487.

II - KENNEDY AND INDUSTRY

"...slightly less dangerous than Mao Tse Tung" - Wall St Journal of RFK in March 1968.

ACCORDING TO AN FBI report, Southern Californian ranchers paid towards a \$500,000 contract to kill Robert Kennedy in June 1968.¹ He had, it is fair to say, never been recognised as a friend of big business, and some of the larger ranchers in California were angry at Kennedy's support for Cesar Chavez, who was trying to unionise their employees.

It would also be fair to say, however, that Kennedy had never been recognised as a friend of big unions, either. In February 1963, President Kennedy told Newsweek journalist Benjamin Bradlee that Jimmy Hoffa of the Teamsters Union had sent an assassin to Washington to kill Robert Kennedy².

Kennedy's problems with organised labour went back to the 1950s when he was part of a Senate investigation which

exposed corruption in several large unions, including Hoffa's International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT).

The investigations were where Kennedy's "ruthless" image first emerged, as he hounded several union officials to breaking-point in the Senate caucus room where, a decade later, he would announce his presidential candidacy. Many thought Kennedy went too far in his harassment of union officials he believed to be corrupt. One Teamster official, John O'Rourke, was badgered so fiercely by Kennedy during the hearings in 1957 that he broke down and cried³.

The Teamsters began at the turn of the century to represent city delivery crafts - drivers of coal, milk and bread trucks. It grew steadily but slowly until the 1930s, when younger leaders organised the union more vigorously, realising that the Teamsters could exert national political influence. With the proliferation of auto transport, the Teamsters were in a powerful position to demand substantial improvements in pay and conditions, as they controlled much of the country's commodity transportation network.

One of these young organisers was Jimmy Hoffa. Like most union officials who end up corrupt, Hoffa began honest. He had started as a junior official with the Teamsters in Detroit, and had helped organise its first city-wide strike in 1937. The strike was violent, and Hoffa later claimed he'd been beaten up "at least two dozen times" that year.⁴

To help his members in their struggle, the young Hoffa had used contacts in organised crime to fight off the bosses' thugs, and when relations between the Teamsters and the governing union body, the Congress of Industrial

Organisations (CIO), soured in 1941, Hoffa brought in his mobster friends to help sort things out.

Within a month CIO control of Detroit was over, and Hoffa's IBT was in control. The war years saw Hoffa standing trial for racketeering in 1941 and 1942 (he had persuaded the draft board that his union work was vital to the war effort, and so had been exempted from military service). Although acquitted, a 1953 Congressional investigation into corruption found evidence of racketeering in thre IBT, with union officials being accused of taking members' money (one car washer told the investigation that his weekly earnings had dropped from \$30 to \$18 after he'd joined the union).⁵

Nevertheless, the Congressional hearings were abruptly ended in 1953, and Hoffa was temporarily spared further investigation. In 1955 he moved the IBT headquarters from Detroit to Washington DC, and managed to gain an innovative benefit for his members, whereby employers agreed to pay \$2 a week per employee into a pension fund. This provided Hoffa with considerable support from his members, and a huge war chest which he could use to extend his influence.

Within a year, he had taken control of most of the eastern states' Teamster operations by winning dubious elections with the support of "paper" locals, i.e. local branches which really only existed on paper, and became second in the union hierarchy to Teamster President Dave Beck.

During these years, Kennedy carried on his work with the Senate Subcommittee on Investigations, which by the mid-1950s was getting over its preoccupation with

anti-communism. An investigation in 1955 into government procurement of uniforms had led the committee into a fresh field of exploration: labour corruption. When Kennedy returned from his work campaigning for Adlai Stevenson in the presidential election of 1956, he began to probe reports of corruption coming from the West Coast, and found that Dave Beck had siphoned off \$320,000 in union funds to build a private home.

Kennedy persuaded Senator McClellan of Arkansas to set up a Senate select committee to look in to union corruption, and in February 1957 the committee opened with Kennedy as leading prosecutor. Dave Beck was ruined within the first month of hearings, being forced to take the Fifth Amendment (a safeguard against self-incrimination) 140 times in one session.

Hoffa proved a wilier adversary. A series of appearances before the committee during 1957 left Hoffa's reputation in tatters, but Kennedy was unable to amass enough evidence against Hoffa to send him to jail, and the union boss's skirmishes with Kennedy seemed only to enhance his popularity with his members.

With Beck about to go to prison at the end of 1957, Hoffa won the Teamster presidency by a majority of three to one, although he was barred from taking up the position by a legal ruling which found some of the delegates voting for Hoffa at the IBT Convention to have been improperly selected.

Moreover, the wider labour movement was embarrassed by Hoffa, and the governing AFL/CIO (the CIO having merged with

the American Federation of Labor in 1955) expelled the IBT from its organisation in 1958. Hoffa dismissed the expulsion as "back-alley politics by the Kennedys".⁶

Nevertheless, Kennedy earned a reputation at this time as a prosecutor given to excess in investigating unions, an image which his father thought might damage John Kennedy's chances for the presidency in 1960. To emphasise his interest in union reform, rather than his interest in persecuting union officials, John Kennedy introduced a bill in 1959 which required union officials to guarantee regular elections with secret ballots, to file financial reports with the Labor Department and to disclose financial deals which might involve conflicts of interests.

The AFL/CIO, aware that the hearings had damaged the image of organised labour across the country, endorsed the bill and took every opportunity to distance itself from the corrupt exploits of the Teamsters (it had also forbidden its representatives to cite the Fifth Amendment before the committee, and had thrown out the East Coast Longshoremens from its movement for thuggishness).

The Kennedy-Ives bill had been presented the year before, but although popular in the Senate, had failed as both the Teamsters and the Eisenhower administration opposed it. This time, it passed after complicated negotiations and provided John Kennedy with a significant piece of legislation to his credit for the 1960 election campaign.

Robert Kennedy's time as prosecutor had not proved stunningly successful in terms of putting bent officials behind bars (in all, only three convictions were secured by

the Department of Justice as a result of the hearings), but he had helped to create a climate for union reform, enabling his brother to take advantage and pass a popular bill.

Throughout his Senate career, however, the "ruthless" tag would remain, and many in the labour movement never trusted him for damaging its reputation during the late 1950s. Among those criticised as a result of Kennedy's investigations were Unions of Bakers, Operating Engineers, United Textile Workers, Meat Cutters, Carpenters, Hotel & Restaurant Workers and Sheet Metal Workers⁷. Of course, Kennedy's prime concern at this stage of his political career was not electoral success for himself, and if making such powerful enemies did not interfere with his brother's chances of the presidency, he had no compunction in upsetting union chiefs.

Moreover, the labour movement was not a monolithic bloc, and there were significant pockets of influence which remained loyal to Kennedy throughout his Senate years. Apart from the various disaffected local Teamsters, who had fallen on the wrong side of Jimmy Hoffa at one time or another, powerful figures like Walter Reuther remained close to Kennedy, and any new coalition would have to include progressive labour leaders like Reuther, president of the influential United Auto Workers (UAW).

Reuther, like Hoffa, had come up through union ranks the hard way. For years, he was suspected as a secret communist by many on the right for the trip he made to the Soviet Union with his brother Victor during the 1930s, but Walter Reuther shared Kennedy's capacity to learn politically. He had been shot in an assassination attempt in the 1940s, and

soon after helped found Americans for Democratic Action with fellow liberals Reinhold Neibhur and Arthur Schlesinger.

He too first met Kennedy during the racket hearings, when Kennedy went to Wisconsin to investigate a strike backed by the UAW, and ended up supporting the strikers' demands for longer lunch breaks. John Kennedy remembered how his brother at this time "might have been intolerant of liberals as such because his early experience was with that high-minded, high-speaking kind who never got anything done. That all changed the moment he met Walter Reuther."⁸

During the investigation into the Wisconsin strike, John Kennedy told the labour leader that "you fellows are educating Bobby", and throughout the next decade Kennedy would look to Reuther as his most important political ally in the union hierarchy.⁹

Although powerful in his own union, however, Reuther's increasing radicalism in the 1960s meant he was losing influence with the wider movement. While the AFL/CIO did not support the March on Washington in August 1963, for instance, Reuther was there, persuading SNCC leader John Lewis to tone down his attacks on the Kennedy administration. Three years later he was supplying Tom Hayden's Students for a Democratic Society with funds for a revolutionary ghetto rehabilitation project.

Reuther was politically light years ahead of his AFL/CIO colleagues (and the UAW would later officially split from the organisation). Virulently anti-communist, the AFL/CIO was never part of the international left, and remained a strident supporter of American involvement in Vietnam

throughout the 1960s. AFL/CIO leader George Meany disliked the more progressive Reuther, and took it as a personal insult when Kennedy praised Reuther at a speech in Detroit in 1964 for all he had done for John Kennedy. Meany had thought himself a greater ally of the late president and was outraged. It was the beginning of Kennedy's difficulties with the AFL/CIO.

However, it was leaders like Reuther Kennedy looked to in forging a new electoral coalition of workers. In 1966, he went to support the striking grape-pickers in California because Reuther asked him to. The grape growers in California were an extremely powerful lobby, and Kennedy was the first politician to visit the strikers in Delano in 1966. "Politically speaking, in California at that time, it was probably a stupid thing to do," said Michael Harrington.¹⁰

The Senate Migratory Labor Subcommittee was due to hold hearings on the issue in Delano, and Kennedy agreed to attend. He became a hero among the grape-pickers almost immediately for his aggressive prosecution of the local law enforcers for their treatment of the pickers, in one memorable incident suggesting that the local sheriff use his lunch-break to read the Constitution of the United States.

It may have been stupid politics, but Kennedy needed the support of those electoral blocs like the migrant workers who were not already organised and controlled by traditional union leaders. The emerging workers' organisations, like the National Farmers Association organised by Cesar Chavez, were not directed by AFL/CIO powerbrokers, and so Kennedy could

go straight to them without having to barter with the (often antagonistic) old guard. This principle - which also extended to the other pools of unorganised poor, like Indians and some blacks - could only be stretched so far. It wasn't as if there were enough people outside the old-style voting blocs to elect him, and he would have to barter with the traditional bosses in the traditional way during the presidential election.

Unfortunately for Kennedy, his main rival in the primaries turned out to be Humphrey, who was hugely popular with the AFL/CIO leadership. Even Reuther could not go against Humphrey and declare himself for Kennedy, which left Kennedy with only a handful of endorsements from local union leaders during the 1968 election.

In the Indiana primary, the only union support which declared for Kennedy were the local UAW branches in Indianapolis and Kokomo. The rest went to local Governor Roger Branigan, widely recognised as a stand-in for Humphrey. President of the Labor Council in Indianapolis Max E. Brydenthall stated that 60% of union members who were Democrats favoured Branigan.

Given the indifference, and sometimes hostility, Kennedy faced in securing the support of union bosses, he aimed his pitch straight at the members. Union members could, of course, be approached at levels other than that of employment: they may fall into other sociological categories where Kennedy was stronger. For example, many union members were young, some black, some Catholic, and Kennedy could garner a significant number of union votes by appealing to

voters on those levels.

In 1967, for example, 25% of union members were under 30, and 50% under 40, a whole generation younger than most union officials. At the AFL/CIO Convention in Miami on December 12 that year, Kennedy shrewdly sent a young emissary who identified with the membership more than the leadership.

The Wall St. Journal noted how "the Senator's Labor Aide, Carter Burden, Harvard '63, stands out in the informal convention setting with his long hair and British-style suits".¹¹ In a bid to counter the influence of union leaders on their members, Kennedy's strategy in the primaries was aimed at leaders of local unions and the younger staff members of the large international unions, but official support either remained neutral (like Reuther), or went to Humphrey.

There is little doubt that there was still enough of the old politician in Kennedy to have won AFL/CIO backing had he won the nomination in 1968, despite his opposition to the war (although such support was withheld from Democratic nominee George McGovern four years later). Nevertheless, traditional union support would have swung heavily behind Humphrey at the Chicago Convention, and was a major obstacle to Kennedy's securing the nomination. According to the estimates of Kennedy aides in 1968, about 300 delegates to the Democratic Convention were union members, but "between 500 and 600 others [of a total number of 2,622] were men whose votes could be influenced by the recommendations of the powerful unions in their area".¹²

While Kennedy could probably count on the support of

organised labour after he had won the nomination, backing from the country's business community would prove far more elusive. Business endorsements were not crucial in deciding the outcome of the Democratic primaries, and were primarily useful to the candidates for fundraising purposes. Kennedy's personal wealth, and his willingness to spend it on campaigning, meant he did not have to bargain with the usual series of business interests which clustered around other candidates.

Kennedy's wealth had come from his father's legendary stockbroking deals in the 1920s and 1930s, and although Joseph Kennedy Sr enjoyed some influential business contacts, he had always been far from the inner circle on Wall St, and was regarded by many in the business community as a conniving cheat, amassing wealth for political ambition.

He had regarded them with similar affection, and in a famous remark described "all businessmen as sons of bitches". Asked in December 1964 about his father's remark, Kennedy said that businessmen were like liberals: "The people who are selfish are interested in their own singular course of action and do not take into consideration the needs or requirements of others or what ultimately be accomplished."¹³

Kennedy's opinion of businessmen remained much the same in the coming years, that they were essentially selfish people uninterested in working for the common good. However, although relatively unimportant in the primary tussles, the business community would be a significant national

constituency when it came to the November election, able to apply powerful lobbying forces on candidates throughout the country, candidates whose support Kennedy would need to win the presidency.

As such, he made sporadic efforts to improve his poor image with big business. Memories of the steel crisis in 1962 didn't help. Nor did his association with Cesar Chavez and the migrant workers, and nor did his constant harassment of the cigarette industry, which could also have been called "stupid politics". The tobacco lobby was much stronger at this time than the anti-smoking lobby, in terms of money and political clout, and in attacking the industry Kennedy was making powerful enemies over an issue which he did not, in strictly electoral terms, have to risk political capital.

Nevertheless, Kennedy was a vigorous opponent of cigarette advertising in his Senate years, introducing bills to curb smoking advertising on television, and proposing that stronger brands of cigarettes be taxed more heavily.

The tobacco industry was, to be fair, mostly concentrated in the south, whose business class would have been hostile to Kennedy anyway. However, his badgering of tobacco interests and his readiness to call for federal regulation to control them must have worried business magnates in other industries.

In June 1965, he opposed a bill calling for health warnings on cigarette packets because it was too weak, and continued to push for stronger legislation. He told the Senate that while "the cigarette lobby spends more than \$300m a year on advertising...300,000 people each year die

from diseases associated with smoking".¹⁴

In April 1966 he suggested that the warning on packets be extended to all kinds of cigarette advertising, and threatened the tobacco industry that if it did not regulate itself "within the next few months...the administration should act". He criticised the industry (as he had the previous year, in exactly the same phrase), for "portraying smoking as the smart, sophisticated thing to do", and compared the idea of federal controls on cigarettes as sensible as those banning dangerous cars.¹⁵

He attacked the equally powerful broadcasting industry for conspiring with the cigarette manufacturers to sell death. "As to young people, the advertising is a weapon to lure them to their ultimate destruction, a tool to lead them to snuff out their own lives at an early day. Both industries, therefore, must come up with realistic programs to police themselves."¹⁶ If they did not, he threatened, the government would do it for them.

Of course, they did not, and the following year Kennedy sponsored five different bills to limit the sale and advertising of cigarettes, including one to forbid the broadcast of such advertising after 9pm and during sports coverage. The day before he introduced this proposal to the Senate on September 12, 1967, he had addressed the World Conference on Smoking and Health. He proposed that anti-smoking commercials be broadcast on television. "One suggestion that I thought appropriate," he said in a jibe at the famous Marlboro ad, "would place the tough, rangy man with the tattoo on his hand in front of a hospital ward and

have him say: 'This is Emphysema country' ".¹⁷

The tobacco barons apart, Kennedy regarded the rest of the business community with little respect, and the feeling was mutual. There were exceptions, of course, and IBM, for instance, had been helpful in supporting the Bedford-Stuyvesant project, but businessmen generally distrusted Kennedy, and he distrusted them.

"[President Kennedy] never liked them", Robert Kennedy said in 1964. "He always just felt that you couldn't do anything with them; there's no way to influence them. We were brought up thinking they were -- My father thought businessmen didn't have any public responsibility. And we just found that they were antagonistic and you couldn't do anything with them".¹⁸

The Kennedy administration's relations with big business had soured badly over the steel incident, although local businessmen were used as a powerful lobbying group by the Kennedys during the integration of the University of Alabama. "We wrote down in a book the name of every company with more than 100 employees - I think - in the whole state of Alabama. All those names were distributed at a Cabinet meeting....A Cabinet member or somebody called, I guess, every one of them....We built up a reaction to what Wallace was doing," Kennedy recalled in 1964.¹⁹

Such co-operation with business interests was rare, however, and in an October 1966 feature on Kennedy the Wall St Journal noted that although he proved a popular campaigner in the mid-term elections, "the South and business community remain areas of substantial resistance".²⁰

Kennedy's entry into the presidential campaign seriously worried many business leaders, and the Wall St Journal wasted no time in outlining the reasons why a Kennedy candidacy was a bad idea: "The South regards the Senator as only slightly less dangerous than Mao Tse-Tung. AFL/CIO president George Meany and other key labor barons have disliked and distrusted him since his days on the staff of the Senate's Labor Racketeering Investigation Committee. Businessmen in both parties have feared him ever since he was his brother's tough lieutenant in the fight against Big Steel," it declared in its edition of April 3, 1968. ²¹

The business magazine Fortune was no more encouraging: "During recent weeks, Fortune has surveyed the political views of business leaders in cities scattered across the nation. At each meeting with the businessmen, mention of the name Bobby Kennedy produced an almost unanimous chorus of condemnation... Although the traditional alignment of business with the Republicans has weakened, there is agreement that Kennedy is the one public figure who could produce an almost united front of business opposition....If Kennedy should become the Democratic candidate, this hostility would stuff the Republican coffers, and if he were elected it might seriously impair his ability to govern."²²

Hubert Humphrey noted that during the early stages of the 1968 presidential campaign "a large share of the money pledged to me came from New York business leaders who feared and distrusted Bob. With his death, their interest in me waned".²³

In an effort to counteract the hostility, Kennedy met

with a few business leaders sympathetic to his candidacy, and they agreed that he should make a major address to a business audience, and have Fortune or the Wall St Journal conduct an independent investigation into what had happened during the steel crisis.

Kennedy's version of events was that although he had ordered the questioning of steel executives, it was the FBI, perhaps being deliberately heavy-handed to discredit him, who burst into the bosses' homes in the early hours of the morning in Gestapo-like raids.

The business address was scheduled for April 5 to the City Club of Cleveland. It was the only appointment Kennedy kept that day, the rest of his schedule having been cancelled due to the assassination of Martin Luther King the day before. At it, however, he dispensed with his prepared speech on the economy and spoke instead about violence.

Had he delivered his address on the economy, many of the businessmen might have been surprised at his neo-liberal ideas. His proposals for ghetto redevelopment were, of course, heavily dependent on private investment and tax breaks for businesses willing to help fight social problems. The war, too, was not overwhelmingly popular with the whole business community - it increased the tax burden significantly. However, most liberal businessmen at this time favoured the Republican Nelson Rockefeller, and Kennedy was unlikely to win many supporters from this group.

He did not have a strong grasp of macroeconomics, but then neither had President Kennedy (who had once remarked that asking Kennedys about economics was like asking nuns

about sex). In fact, the Kennedys' only real political disagreement with each other during the administration (other than a minor skirmish over the building of a dam in Ghana) was over a cut in the rate of income tax.

At the start of the administration, the Attorney General was in favour of increasing income tax to "bring home to the American people...the fact that everybody was making a sacrifice".²⁴ The President opposed the idea, as did most financial experts, and the event nurtured the idea that Robert Kennedy was a lightweight economist, prepared to mess with the economy for political points. (Speaking about the incident with Kennedy in 1964, John Bartlow Martin recalled: "I think at the time the general impression was that you were alone in this position".)²⁵

The image was hard to shake off in business circles, and the Bedford-Stuyvesant project was regarded by some businessmen as little more than gimmickry. The Wall St Journal made it difficult for its readers to take the Kennedy candidacy seriously. "He must push the jet setters further into the background of his entourage. Many campaign aides are breathless young dilettantes with names like Pebble and Muffie, who create the impression that the Kennedy headquarters has replaced Acapulco as the place to be this year," it noted a month before Kennedy's first primary.²⁶

For all his efforts in attracting top industrialists to his campaign, by the end of May 1968 a national Citizens for Kennedy advertisement included only two significant business names: Jerold Hoffberger of the National Brewing Company,

and an old friend of Joseph Kennedy Sr., and Harold Williams, President of Hunt Foods and Industries.

The business community was a low electoral priority for Kennedy during the primaries, however, and was unlikely to ever form part of any radical alternative coalition. No doubt many would have been distraught at the prospect of a Robert Kennedy but despite apocalyptic warnings would not have sabotaged the economy just to make life difficult for him. Business had, after all, put up with John Kennedy and (unless certain assassination conspiracy theories are to be believed), had not prevented him from governing the country.

Traditional labour organisations probably had more to fear from a Robert Kennedy presidency. In dismantling the old New Deal structure to build an alternative Democratic structure, union bosses - along with some southern politicians - may have found themselves early casualties of Kennedy's new power base. Little love would have been lost on either side.

This chapter has tried to establish the nature of Kennedy's relations with American industry and labour movements. With a few notable exceptions, Robert Kennedy never repaired the damage to his relations with the union leadership inflicted by the 1950s corruption hearings. However, the decline in the power of the union bosses meant that by 1968 Kennedy could attract the votes of many union members despite the hesitancy of union barons.

Although he made sporadic attempts to improve relations with the business community, he remained widely distrusted

in much of the industrial sector. His relentless badgering of the tobacco industry, for example, and his enthusiasm for government regulation of cigarette advertising, particularly worried business leaders that he did not share their views on economic policy.

NOTES

1. John Davis in Melanson p4
2. Bradlee p126
3. O'Rourke soon recovered. By 1964, he was President of Teamster Joint Council 16 in New York City, the largest Teamster organisation in the state. Joint Council 16 endorsed RFK for the Senate in 1964. See Sheridan, p379
4. Moldea p26
5. ibid p56
6. ibid p84
7. Schlesinger p183
8. Schlesinger p191
9. Schlesinger p191
10. Stein p89
11. Wall St Journal Dec 12 1967
12. Vanden Heuvel p356
13. RFK: In His Own Words p204
14. Congressional Record p13903. Speech to Senate chamber.
15. ibid
16. ibid
17. ibid p25129. Ted Kennedy carried on the fight against cigarette advertising after RFK's death. In January 1976 he introduced a bill with Senator Gary Hart to establish a new "health tax" on cigarettes, with the amount on each brand determined by the brand's tar and nicotine content.
18. RFK: In His Own Words p204
19. ibid p194
20. WStJ Oct 17 1966

21. WStJ April 3 1968
22. Vanden Heuvel p352
23. Humphrey p324
24. RFK: In His Own Words p300
25. ibid p301
26. WStJ 3 April 1968

III - KENNEDY AND THE NEW LEFT

"George Wallace is Robert Kennedy in drag..." - Jerry Rubin.

WHEN Ginsberg visited Kennedy's office and was quizzed about his political links with the Black Power movement, the conversation lurched from LSD to religion to reconstructing the human universe, and finished with Ginsberg chanting the Hare Krishna mantra for the senator.

Kennedy, not much the wiser about youth politics, made his excuses and left, still wondering if a coalition of youth groups could be put together and, if so, how strong it would be. During the mid-60s, the demographic changes in America meant that there were more people aged under 35 than at any time in the nation's history.

Children born after the Second World War also enjoyed an unsurpassed material security which allowed them, claim some commentators, to indulge in self-conscious social and

political behaviour. Whatever the reasons for the tumultuous changes in youth culture, there was no denying its existence or the possible impact it could have on the political agenda, as the universities in particular became increasingly politicised.

Kennedy's interest in this new generation was primarily political, and as the new leader of the radical left in his party would have to establish links with the larger youth organisations who were at the forefront of dissent. The new radicals, or "New Left", as they were usually referred to at this time, were remarkably different from those on the old left, who had emerged in the 1930s and either become New Dealers or communist sympathisers. The New Left was broadly anti-communist (although this distinction was difficult for many in the US government to understand), anti-authoritarian and often unfocused in its political objectives.

As such, Kennedy could identify more easily with the New Left, with its evolving and uncertain policy direction, than with the old-style left, many of whom distrusted him anyway for his part in the labour racketeering hearings of the 1950s.

In June 1964, the Socialist Youth Conference (made up broadly of university students, but decidedly old left in its traditions) voted on a resolution chastising Kennedy for his record as Attorney General. The motion failed (229 to 202) but is revealing if compared with his relations to New Left groups at this time.¹

These, of course, were early days in terms of Kennedy's links with the new radicals, but as Attorney General he had

already had significant dealings with one of the two most important New Left organisations to emerge in the following years - the Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC). Born in 1960, SNCC had resisted being co-opted by any of the adult organisations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), or the Committee for Racial Equality (CORE) which offered it financial support but were often perturbed by its controversial tactics.

SNCC had been involved in the sit-ins to highlight segregation in southern states, and later had injected impetus into the Freedom Ride movement at a time when it appeared the Freedom Riders would have to call off their attempt to integrate interstate bus terminals. As Attorney General, an exasperated Kennedy had been asked to ensure the safety of those involved in the Freedom Rides, and he had taken some steps to make sure that the buses progressed (including a famous call to "Mr Greyhound" to get a driver for one group of riders threatened with violence).

Nevertheless, Kennedy had regarded the Freedom Rides (with some justification) as publicity stunts designed to cause his brother's administration international embarrassment. Kennedy had urged SNCC to concentrate on voter registration for blacks in the southern states, instead of sensational media events. As Attorney General, he argued, he could afford them more vigorous backing if they concentrated on registration, as the federal role in such matters was much clearer, and hence more easily enforceable, than with the desegregation of public facilities. Voter

registration drives also provided fewer embarrassing photo opportunities than, for instance, mobs stoning a bus.

SNCC did do a lot of voter registration work at this time, and were given significant backing by the Kennedy administration, which was often identified in the south with the SNCC radicals urging blacks to register. The Deputy Sheriff in Dawson, Georgia, interrogated SNCC activist Ralph Allen in 1963, and demanded:

"Did Bobby Kennedy send you?"

"Indirectly," replied Allen.²

SNCC's relationship with the Kennedy administration was far from one of mutual admiration, however, and during the March on Washington SNCC leader John Lewis was persuaded at the last minute to refrain from publicly criticising the administration's record on civil rights. Lewis represented the moderate wing of SNCC, however, and in May 1966 he lost the chairmanship of the organisation to the far more radical Stokely Carmichael. Carmichael was too extreme for Kennedy to deal with directly, but Kennedy appealed to much of Carmichael's political base, a fact Carmichael acknowledged. However, SNCC joined Kennedy in backing the grape-pickers at Delano, and (Carmichael apart) SNCC supporters would be an important part of any youth coalition sought by Kennedy. Another block in any new political framework would be the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Described by Carl Oglesby, its president in 1965, as "the SNCC of the north", SDS was to prove the most influential youth group during the latter half of the decade, and is credited with organising huge anti-Vietnam

War demonstrations.³ However, SDS was more than a single-issue movement. In its earlier years of 1963 and 1964, the emphasis was on ghetto renewal and community action politics. Founded in Michigan in 1962, the SDS was based on the famous "Port Huron Statement", which eschewed the old materialist values of American capitalism, and declared "that work should involve incentives worthier than survival", and be creative and educative.

The Port Huron Statement attacked the alienation of the American workforce, and drew on the writings of C. Wright Mills to insist that "a new left must transform modern complexity into issues that can be understood and felt close-up by every human being....In a time of supposed prosperity, moral complacency and political manipulation, a new left cannot rely on only aching stomachs to be the engine for social reform."⁴

Tom Hayden, SDS president in 1963, persuaded the leader of the Union of Auto Workers Walter Reuther to donate \$5,000 to the SDS ghetto projects. Reuther, it should be noted, was also the sort of union leader Kennedy regarded as important to an alternative Democratic coalition. Reuther represented links to the new and old left. He had broken from the old union networks, but had a tradition of radicalism stretching back to the 1930s, when he had visited the Soviet Union.

He had been a founder of the American for Democratic Action organisation in the late 1940s with liberals like Arthur Schlesinger and Reinhold Niebuhr, and had himself been shot in an assassination attempt. Kennedy's personal

links with Reuther went back to the labour racket hearings. Despite his associations with the old socialist factions, Reuther had maintained credibility with the emerging New Left, who regarded him as a different breed from the more traditional union bosses, and it was Reuther who interceded on the Kennedy administration's behalf to persuade Lewis to change his speech during the March on Washington.

The programmes Reuther's money funded for the SDS were not unlike those advocated by Kennedy in his urban renewal proposals. The money went to the Economic and Research Action Project (ERAP) in Newark, which Hayden described as "like a SNCC programme", and which encouraged participatory democracy and community action.⁵ Kennedy was one of the few national politicians who enjoyed significant credibility in SDS circles, and at least one ERAP activist worked for Kennedy's 1964 Senate campaign. Hayden notes that by 1967 "the only politician who expressed an interest in what I was doing was Robert Kennedy", although Kennedy's interest in Hayden often centred on what sort of political links he could offer to other organisations.⁶

SDS saw itself as very different from the old leftist student organisations, and deliberately moved its headquarters away from the tribal feuds of the old left in New York and set up in Chicago. By 1965 the Vietnam War began to dominate the SDS agenda and national politics. A march organised by the group in April 1965 attracted 60,000 demonstrators to Washington, and in June SNCC activist Julian Bond was elected to the Georgia state legislature on an anti-war platform. (Bond was denied taking his seat

because of his stance on the war.)

In November, another SDS anti-war rally attracted tens of thousands to Washington, and in the following February Kennedy broke with the White House in calling for a coalition government in Vietnam. However, the anti-Vietnam War coalition was certainly not a majority at this time (or at any time before Kennedy's death), and Kennedy had to ensure that he was not too closely identified with the anti-war demonstrators. Once he had made his break with the Johnson administration, and claimed some of the radical ground to the left of the party, he fell into a long silence about the issue and did not speak out again as forcefully for another year.

Elsewhere in the country, meanwhile, the SDS and other New Left organisations were trying to mobilise opposition to the war on a variety of fronts. Demonstrations were fine for politicising the public, but did not appear to be changing policy. During the summer of 1966, Bob Scheer, editor of Ramparts, organised an electoral campaign for the Democratic Party nomination to Congress in the San Francisco Bay Area. He won 45% of votes on a radical platform firmly opposing the war. Others also stood as peace candidates during the mid-term elections, but without registering the sort of success Scheer achieved.

Moreover, the anti-war policy, though potentially powerful, was not enough on which Kennedy could base his national constituency. The issue, and with it his political base, could disappear within a week, and he was careful not to ally himself solely with those New Leftists opposing the

war.

The poverty, or black, issue, provided some scope for relations with the new activists, and in ideological terms they were more receptive to his ideas for private capital helping to renew urban centres than the old-style socialist left would have been. Of course, not all Americans under 30, or even the majority of students, were New Leftists. However, it was New Left philosophy which was becoming increasingly influential on campuses throughout the mid-60s.

The relatively conservative National Student Association (NSA), for instance, which represented the respectable face of student politics, passed resolutions at its 1965 convention for a halt to offensive action in Vietnam, the admission of China to the UN and the establishment of a national police force to protect civil rights.

While NSA students were eventually drawn to the McCarthy campaign in 1968, Kennedy's appeal appears to have skipped over much of this moderate faction, and he was to find a surprising amount of support in the more radical youth elements. However, one radical New Leftist who was not impressed by Kennedy's image of developing radicalism was Bob Scheer. "He's been raised in a traditional, political bag, and he was fundamentally a hack," he noted, but conceded that Kennedy "could be awed by radicals".⁷

Scheer wrote a lengthy and critical profile of Kennedy for Ramparts in February 1967, which warned New Leftists not to trust the senator. "What Bobby learned during the course of the [1964] campaign was that it was possible to

gain liberal support without losing the other; for while 'bosses' care about the substance of power, liberals remain suckers for mere rhetoric."⁸ Scheer was determined not to believe the hype: "The Kennedy people have raised co-option to an art form. At hearings of his subcommittee, his tours through New York's ghettos, and during speeches before dozens of college audiences, they have hooked onto the mood of crisis and, as with everything else, have come to use it."⁹

However, while Scheer accused Kennedy of relying on "standard Cold War mythology" in foreign affairs, Scheer himself was guilty of standard class war mentality in criticising the plans for fighting poverty. "On relying on private investment as a panacea for Latin American problems, he is clearly to the right of the New Deal," he declared, not grasping that Kennedy's "hack" background enabled him to break out of the old right v. left equation.¹⁰

Andrew Kopkind, writing for Ramparts during the '68 primaries, made the same mistake of viewing Kennedy in the context of old ideology, but this time came down admiringly on the senator's side: "The Kennedy men have been interested in reorganising Democratic politics ..., but they put little stock in the peace movement as their agent. Rather, they favour the 'urban' route; the angry and oppressed masses in the cities are a tougher force than the suburban [anti-war] SANE-niks. The Kennedys don't forget their Marxism."¹¹

Both Scheer and Kopkind got near to the point, but missed it. Kennedy's overriding motivation was neither to the right of the New Deal nor Marxism. He was trying to put

together a vaguely liberal (and the vaguer the better, as it would exclude fewer participants) to form a national constituency. He had severe image problems with some of the older leftists (I.F. Stone and James Baldwin both backed Keating in the Senate race), but the New Left liberalism offered him the chance to develop a new base on the left without relying on the old unions and former New York socialists. It was the very lack of ideology in the New Left which attracted him to them, and them to him.

New Left leader Abbie Hoffman, for instance, acknowledged Kennedy's attraction for many radicals. In December 1967, Hoffman founded the Youth International Party (Yippie!), designed to obstruct the Democratic Convention in Chicago the following summer. It was part of a wider New Left movement, which included organisations like the National Mobilisation Committee to End the War in Vietnam, to protest at the convention.

The New Left rallying cry from the end of 1967 was "On to Chicago", and various schemes (including the "nomination" of a pig) were planned to create disturbances in the city. Hoffman explained how Yippie! drew support from many of those supporting Kennedy's presidential campaign. "Bobby, there was the real threat. A direct challenge to the theatre-in-the-streets, a challenge to the charisma of Yippie!"

When Kennedy announced his candidacy in March, "it was no contest," says Hoffman. "When young longhairs told you they'd heard that Bobby turned on, you knew Yippie! was really in trouble".¹²

By the end of May, Hoffman's constituency had been so severely eroded by the Kennedy campaign that it was disbanded. After Kennedy's death, it was resurrected, and duly caused chaos in Chicago. Kennedy's appeal to the Yippie! constituency was apparently based largely on emotion ("a challenge to the charisma of Yippie!..."). As with his campaigning style in black areas, Kennedy appears to have relied heavily on style, leading Scheer to warn in Ramparts that Kennedy "could easily co-opt the prevailing dissent without delivering to it ... providing the illusion of dissent without its substance".¹³

Yippie! co-founder Jerry Rubin was similarly unimpressed with Kennedy's reliance on glamour: "The right-wing menace exists but it's not George Wallace. It's the Kennedy liberals....George Wallace is Robert Kennedy in drag."¹⁴

In his 1967 book To Seek a Newer World, which was to become his presidential campaign manifesto, Kennedy's opening chapter is on youth, and in an emotional attempt to claim his brother's charisma by aligning himself with the martyred image of the dead president, Kennedy refers to "the story of Moses, who brought his people within sight of the promised land and then dies, leaving to Joshua the leadership in achieving goals that both completely shared".¹⁵

Similarly direct appeals were made to youthful audiences throughout the presidential campaign, with a student audience in Kansas being told that they were "the most important generation in history". Nevertheless, the chapter on youth in Kennedy's manifesto is primarily concerned with outlining the part young people could play in a new

coalition. He cites the example of the radical Provos in Amsterdam who stood for municipal elections with some success, and whose ideas were incorporated into mainstream politics.

Kennedy pointed out that the old left had little to offer the new generation, and that liberals must be prepared to adapt to the New Left agenda. "Nor, painful as it may be for liberals to acknowledge, are these young people enchanted with liberal institutions....They think labour has grown sleek and bureaucratic with power... occasionally even corrupt and exploitative, a force not for change, but for the status quo," he explained.¹⁶

The tone of the chapter is one of Kennedy interpreting the younger generation's grievances for the adult world. In a argument, which is peppered with quotations from Dylan, Lennon and the radical Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, Kennedy appears to offer himself as a go-between between the young dissenters and the older voters, just as he often presented himself to white audiences as a person who understood black frustrations, and could deal with them.

Traditional liberals were often among the most suspicious of the New Left. The radicals, after all, threatened liberal symbols like the universities, and attacked working-class heroes like Richard Daley. The tension between the old and new liberals who supported Kennedy was evident during his Senate career, and was exacerbated during his presidential campaign.

Traditional liberal Arthur Schlesinger remains bitter towards the New Left. "If you look at the leaders of the New

Left, where the hell are they?" he said in 1985. "They're selling real estate or they're on Wall Street like Jerry Rubin, or they're in the State Assembly in California [Tom Hayden]. I mean, these weren't highly principled figures. These were opportunistic figures...none of them I know is a New Leftist today. I think it was an ephemeral movement....[Adam] Walinsky [Kennedy Senate aide and speechwriter] was bitter on the left and now he's bitter on the right...".¹⁷

Kennedy faced difficulties in trying to join the old and new leftists in any sort of coalition, let alone putting them together to work with more traditionally hostile elements, like blue-collar whites. Nevertheless, he kept on searching out New Left ideas to incorporate into his new agenda, and in February 1967 met with Tom Hayden and another New Leftist, Staughton Lynd before delivering his major speech on Vietnam. At the end of the meeting, Kennedy said he was going on to have dinner with two liberals from the old school, Schlesinger and John Kenneth Galbraith, and that Hayden and Lynd were welcome to carry on the discussion there. Both declined. "I just had no desire to become part of that circle of intellectuals, because I didn't feel I belonged there," remembered Lynd.¹⁸

As 1968 approached, however, Kennedy's links with the New Left became stronger. He overcame revelations in early 1967 that as Attorney General he had approved CIA subsidies to the NSA and other "moderate" student organisations designed to counter the activities of communist and other radical student groups (which presumably included the SDS).

By the time of the 1968 election many NSA members preferred McCarthy, while the more radical student elements, like those found in the SDS, supported Kennedy. The NSA membership, although broadly against the war, tended to be involved with local anti-Vietnam protests rather than national demonstrations.

McCarthy's much-vaunted appeal to disaffected youth was, according to one study of the New Hampshire primary, confined "to quieter students, rather than radical demonstrators".¹⁹ Only a minority of McCarthy's student volunteers had taken part in any of the major anti-war marches, found Sidney Hyman in his study of Youth in Politics. In fact, in a study of 800 McCarthy volunteers in the New Hampshire primary, it was found that the young weren't represented any more than any other age group, with as many volunteers aged between 50 and 55 as between 20 and 25.²⁰

The idea of a McCarthy children's crusade was rooted in media hype, and from the initial press reports to come out of New Hampshire one particular weekend in January, when students were heavily represented among the volunteers. Kennedy, on the other hand, was becoming increasingly associated with the more extreme elements in the New Left (or "the beards" as he called them).

In a confidential FBI memo dated July 20, 1968, an un-named agent reports "that it was rumoured prior to the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy that substantial sums of 'Kennedy money' were given to Tom Hayden and Renee Davis, both affiliated with the National Mobilisation Committee to

End the War in Vietnam, to create demonstrations at the National Democratic Convention, August 1968".²¹

The FBI report continues: These demonstrations, funded by 'Kennedy money' were to be directed against President Lyndon B. Johnson, and for Senator Kennedy....a large meeting was called at an unknown lake outside Chicago, Illinois for the purpose of planning these demonstrations. Source related one ----- [name deleted by the FBI] co-ordinated the invitations to this conference, and made free airline tickets available to various groups, through Hayden and Davis".²²

No doubt there were elements in the FBI willing to believe Kennedy was engaged in subversive operations, but there is no better example of how far Kennedy had come during his Senate years than in the existence of this document: he was on the CIA's side in 1963 in countering the threat of groups like the SDS, but five years later he was suspected of being in cahoots with their leaders to disrupt the Democratic Convention.

Although it would be an exaggeration to imply that Kennedy was very close to the SDS on many policy matters, he did respond to the sorts of concerns they expressed probably better than any other national politician (including McCarthy). He was not, however, in favour of a unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam, and did not (overtly, at least), share the hippies' advocacy of free love and drugs (although New Left historian and Kennedy admirer Jack Newfield did point out that during Senate hearings on drugs Kennedy "was less tough on the pro-LSD witnesses than was

his younger brother").²³

In a piece for The Nation in November 1966, Newfield also declared that while Kennedy was "not an advocate of reforming our repressive narcotics and abortion laws, he is not a headline-hunting crusader against the beard and beats".²⁴ While Kennedy himself could not ever accurately be described as having been a New Leftist, his emerging liberalism incorporated much of the style, and content, of what the younger radicals were saying.

In a standard campaign speech delivered dozens of times at stops in small towns during the 1968 presidential primaries, Kennedy told voters they would "find neither national purpose nor personal satisfaction in a mere continuation of economic progress, in an endless amassing of worldly goods...the gross national product includes air pollution and advertising for cigarettes, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage... it does not allow for the health of our families, the quality of their education or the joy of their play...".²⁵ Hayden found the speech startling "in its resemblance to Port Huron", and with several other leading figures on the New Left (including writer Pete Hamill) went to work for Kennedy in the California primary.²⁶

Many planned to work for Kennedy in the New York primary, scheduled for June 18, which of course he never entered. The last words Kennedy ever spoke were the New Left slogan "on to Chicago", where any chance of coalition between old and new liberals eventually died. If Kennedy had made it to Chicago, even without winning the nomination, the split

might have been avoided, but as it was - with old left hero Mayor Daley ordering his police to attack the new radicals - the wound proved mortal.

Hayden and Hoffman were among eight New Leftists tried inciting violence at the convention, in a trial FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover regarded as an opportunity "to seriously disrupt and curtail the activities of the New Left".²⁷ Humphrey proved an unattractive candidate to the New Left, and in 1972 George McGovern tried so hard to appeal to the new liberal vote that he could not carry the old labour left.

Kennedy, for all his misunderstanding of the hippie subculture, might have brought the New Left into mainstream liberalism as part of an electoral and governing coalition. No-one else came close.

In this chapter, Kennedy's response to the rise of the New Left has been analysed. By exploring the political muscle of the New Left, Kennedy demonstrated an awareness of its potential before most of his Congressional colleagues. Realising that the New Left was not a part of the old international socialist movement, nor simply a new generation of the Old Left, he attracted some of their most radical elements.

Although this attraction was based primarily on his anti-war position, it also relied on his personal charisma and his youthful image.

NOTES

1. Hymin p236
2. Zinn p140
3. Hayden p87
4. ibid p312
5. ibid p212
6. ibid no.1 p220
7. Ramparts, February 1967
8. ibid
9. ibid
10. ibid
11. Ramparts March 1968
12. Hoffman p240
13. Ramparts February 1967
14. p58 Rubin
15. RFK: To Seek a Newer World p14
16. ibid
17. Schlesinger, personal interview June 1985
18. Stein p198
19. Hymin p256
20. ibid p189
21. Hayden p287
22. ibid
23. The Nation, November 1966
24. ibid
25. Newfield p324
26. Hayden p290
27. ibid

IV - FOREIGN POLICY: THE WHITE HOUSE EXPERIENCE

"The Americans ... had, on the whole, been open and candid with us, especially Robert Kennedy." - Premier Khrushchev, after the Cuban Missile Crisis.

DURING THE Senate vote on January 21 1961 to confirm Robert Kennedy as Attorney General, several senators expressed reservations about his lack of experience for the job. Although none actually voted against the appointment, a handful made long speeches pointing out that he had never practised as a lawyer. Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois, the Republican leader on the Judiciary Committee, joined with several colleagues in recording that he had received a large amount of mail urging him to oppose the nomination, and also reminded the Senate that Robert Kennedy, if appointed, "must advise the President not only on domestic problems, but on international problems as well".¹

In the following three years, Robert Kennedy would become

more involved in the execution of U.S. foreign policy than any other Attorney General before or since. His influence on foreign policy increased throughout the Kennedy administration, and his role would develop far beyond the constitutional boundaries of advising the president on foreign affairs to developing major initiatives on his own, and sometimes made key decisions on international affairs without the President's knowledge.

By the time of his brother's assassination in 1963, Robert Kennedy was in effect deputy president in many areas of foreign policy, and on occasions when his brother was absent actually took presidential decisions on critical international events. His familiarity with world affairs on becoming Attorney General in 1961 was limited, although it was probably greater than his knowledge of many aspects of the law.

An early initiation into the world of foreign policy began at the age of 13, when in 1938 his father was appointed Ambassador to the Court of St James. The appointment turned out to be a disastrous one for Joseph Kennedy's political career, as his reluctance to urge American entry into the Second World War branded him an anti-Semitic appeaser.

Whether the streak of dissent on US foreign policy which Robert Kennedy was to reveal in his last years was rooted in his father's experience is difficult to assess, although as a senator 30 years later Robert Kennedy would defend the rights of those opposed to US involvement in war.

With his father's policy discredited by the attack on

Pearl Harbour and American entry into the war, Robert Kennedy's international education was halted, and his next venture abroad was a tourist trip to Latin America as a reward for his work in helping John Kennedy win a Congressional seat in 1946.

The trip apparently made little impression on him politically, however, and it was only in 1948, when his father sent him on an educational mission to Europe and the Middle East that he first began to formulate his own serious ideas on international politics. Thanks to his father's contacts, Robert Kennedy left America armed with impressive letters of introduction from a number of influential figures, and an accreditation from the Boston Post to act as a foreign correspondent.

In Israel when the British mandate ended, Kennedy (now 23) was arrested by police, blindfolded and taken for interrogation. In dispatches to his Boston readers he dutifully blamed the British for the mess in the Middle East, before travelling to Europe, where the threat of war over Berlin and Czechoslovakia appeared imminent.

Kennedy had by no means become an instant expert on international affairs during the trip, but was no longer a novice, and another such fact-finding trip three years later proved significantly influential on his thinking in later years, as impressions he formed with John Kennedy in 1951 shaped many of their attitudes to foreign policy matters when they took over the White House a decade later.

His unfavourable opinion of Nehru, for example, was made during the trip in '51, and remained unchanged ten years

later. Speaking in 1967, Robert Kennedy remembered how "Nehru just talked to my sister Pat and directed everything to her. My brother always remembered that ...[JFK] really hated Nehru. Nehru was really rude to us when we went to India in 1951".²

More significant, though, was the impression the brothers developed about struggles for national liberation. Robert Kennedy was shocked on his '51 trip at how little American diplomatic staff knew about "the people", and his own disdain for official diplomatic channels during his Senate years can be traced back to this experience.

The Kennedys' evaluation (and it can be safely assumed that the brothers' views coincided so closely to be considered a shared evaluation) was largely based on their experience in Saigon, where Robert Kennedy noted that the French were "greatly hated", and he blamed the Americans for not insisting "on definite political reforms by the French towards the natives as prerequisites to any aid. As it stands now we are becoming more and more involved in the war to a point where we can't back out".³

Although the assessment is not without irony when considered against the Kennedy administration's policy on Vietnam, this early judgement reveals much about John and Robert Kennedy's foreign policy principles. These ideas can be found in the Alliance for Progress, and the various initiatives the administration undertook in Africa.

This appreciation that it was in America's best interests to identify itself with those agitating for self-determination did not dawn on many other political

figures until much later in the century, and not all have grasped it yet. However, this belief (though not always carried out in action) remained the most positive aspect of the Kennedys' foreign policy for the remainder of both their lives, and made them heroes in a variety of unlikely places around the world.

The 1951 trip was set up (again with their father's help) to promote John Kennedy as a foreign policy expert and enhance his credentials for his Senate campaign the following year. Following his victory over Henry Cabot Lodge in 1952, John Kennedy's career in the Senate was generally marked by its moderation and blandness. The Senate for John (and Robert) was always going to be a platform from which to launch an assault on the presidency, and throughout his eight years John Kennedy was careful not to make enemies by championing controversial campaigns - except once.

His only major break with mainstream political thinking during his whole Congressional career was over national independence for Algeria. At a time when Washington was trying to maintain a discreet silence over the war against the French in Algeria, John Kennedy accused the Eisenhower administration of helping France continue a repressive colonial war and refusing to recognise legitimate Algerian claims for self-determination.

In July 1957 he called on the US to "redouble its efforts to earn the respect and friendship of nationalist leaders⁴". This belief, rooted less in ideological sympathy with the Algerians than with basic common sense on what was best for US interests, surfaced in Robert Kennedy's decision several

years later to receive Eduardo Mondlane in the Attorney General's office. Mondlane was head of Frelimo, the liberation movement in Mozambique which eventually threw out the Portuguese to gain independence, and Kennedy's invitation was regarded in some quarters as an insult to Portugal.

It would not be fair to suggest that the Kennedys were secretly battling for the overthrow of colonial governments during their time in the White House, and Nelson Mandela was originally arrested, it should be remembered, after a tip-off from the CIA during the Kennedy administration. Nevertheless, John Kennedy's speech on Algeria was at least a recognition of the validity of one liberation struggle, and his time on the Subcommittee for African Affairs in the Senate presumably expanded his understanding of international politics during the 1950s.

Robert Kennedy, meanwhile, was not generally involved with international affairs during this time. During his brother's Senate career, Robert remained in government service, working for various Senate committees investigating the Teamsters' Union and organised crime.

He had also spent the six months following John Kennedy's election to the Senate working for Senator Joe McCarthy as assistant counsel for the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, when he was given a foreign-related task: to research the trade carried on by US allies with Communist China. By the time of his appointment as Attorney General, Kennedy's knowledge of international affairs was based on a spell as an ambassador's son, a short foray into the navy,

his research for McCarthy on Chinese trade patterns, and a couple of trips around the world.

Despite these limitations, he had helped to engineer his brother's victory in an election which had been dominated in a large part by the Cold War, and which candidate was best able to deal with it. It was not crucial to global security in 1961 that the US appoint an Attorney General who was an expert on international affairs, but in his unique position as deputy president, Robert Kennedy's influence over world events was far greater than the framers of the US Constitution, or even Everett Dirksen, could have predicted.

By the early 1960s the US found itself taking over commitments for which it was ill-prepared. Its decision to enter the Second World War proved more far-reaching than did the decision to enter the First. At the end of the war, the US found itself outright winners - its country's infrastructure was intact, its enemies defeated, and much of the world looked to it for economic survival.

However, by taking up responsibilities which Britain and other colonial powers found they could no longer afford, the US soon made itself the most unpopular country in the world. It didn't add to its popularity rating by backing oppressive regimes in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East to protect its economic interests.

The bankrupt colonial powers were more than willing to cede their traditional spheres of influence to the new world power which, during the 1950s, appeared militarily and politically unassailable. However, centuries of diplomatic experience in dealing with the Third World could not be so

easily transferred from the European powers to the US, and American unfamiliarity with local concerns in Vietnam, Israel and dozens of other countries around the world was to prove disastrous.

For example, when British Prime Minister Atlee refused to play any part in the partitioning of Palestine after the war, he not only "deftly exchanged the United States for Britain as the most disliked Power in the Middle East," as Dean Acheson observed, but also ensured that Washington came to dominate the region.⁵ Washington, however, with only a handful of years on the world scene, stood like a child next to the European grandmasters of geopolitical diplomacy and too often revealed its lack of sophistication in displays of Manichaeic policy-making.

By the '50s American foreign policy experts still lacked the intelligence-gathering agencies necessary to police the world, and its institutions were ravaged by a Red Scare, itself a result of failing to understand the motives of foreign governments. It was not as though the old powers had never made mistakes, of course, as evidenced by two world wars in 30 years, but the US made some staggering foreign policy judgements in this period. When Frank Bender, the CIA's chief expert on Latin American Communism met Fidel Castro in 1959 for a three-hour interview, he enthused: "Castro is not only not a Communist; he is a strong anti-Communist fighter".⁶

It was against this background that the Kennedys entered the White House. The American public, indirectly empowered to solve many of the problems of the rest of the world, had

little understanding of international affairs. John Kennedy's Catholic religion had featured significantly in the 1960 campaign, primarily because of the electorate's xenophobia.

It was not because John Kennedy believed in transubstantiation or the Immaculate Conception which bothered much of the public, but that he might somehow be open to manipulation by the Vatican. President Kennedy's inaugural address was a self-conscious acceptance of the US's new role in world affairs. Inexperienced, like most of his fellow Americans, in international affairs, he promised too much and understood too little.

His new Attorney General, it should be added, understood even less, but was immediately involved in appointing representatives of the US government around the world. Although he had never negotiated with a foreign government, Robert Kennedy, now 36, spent his first days in cabinet advising his brother on major ambassadorial appointments.

In an oral history programme recorded the year before Robert Kennedy was killed, he was asked about various aspects of his involvement in foreign policy questions during the Kennedy administration. "It is interesting to look back on all these things going on," he said. "I was involved in more things than I thought".⁷

The extent of Robert Kennedy's influence on world events during those years is remarkable by any standards, especially in the light of his credentials. In the oral history, he reveals that before he was asked to become Attorney General, President Kennedy offered him the

ambassadorship to Moscow. ("I didn't think it was a good idea," he noted).⁸

Within days, however, he was being asked for his advice on who would be the best person to send to the Soviet Union in his place, and for suggestions to fill other ambassadorial vacancies. Robert Kennedy, in 1967, remembered those ambassadors who were appointed because they were colleagues of the President, and those who were appointed because they were colleagues of his own. "Then a good number of them I knew. So, if there were a particular problem, I'd have correspondence with them, whether it's Jim Wine [then Ambassador to the Ivory Coast], or Bill Attwood [Ambassador to Guinea], or [William P.] Mahoney in Ghana, and some of the others...".⁹

Within weeks of the Kennedy administration, it was clear that Robert Kennedy was not bound by the traditional constitutional limits on an Attorney General. He was the President's brother, and so could apparently roam at will into other areas of responsibility and decision-making (although where he stood on the question of accountability if, for instance, a decision he made outside his remit turned out to be a mistake is not clear).

At times, it appears as though Robert Kennedy actually thought of himself as an alternative president when his brother could not be reached. In May 1961, President Trujillo, the Dominican Republic's president, was assassinated, sparking off a major crisis in the region.

President Kennedy was in Paris, on his way to Vienna at the time, and so Robert Kennedy, in Washington, immediately

assumed the mantle of the President. "...Nobody seemed to be doing anything," he remembered in 1964. "...I guess I had the major responsibility of trying to work out some plans....We moved the fleet in closer."¹⁰

Robert Kennedy's memories of how the incident developed become even more revealing, as he practically claims to have been the President during the time when John Kennedy was in Europe. John Bartlow Martin, interviewing Robert Kennedy in Virginia in April 1964, asks if the Kennedy administration knew in advance of the Trujillo assassination.

Martin: "I don't think they'd plan to assassinate a chief of state without telling the President."

Kennedy: "No. That's what I think. They wouldn't have done it without telling me."¹¹ [my italics]

However good the quality of advice Robert Kennedy gave to the President, he was not empowered by the Constitution to think of himself as President, and on another occasion - in dealing with Castro for the return of prisoners captured during the Bay of Pigs - Robert Kennedy was apparently negotiating with the Cuban leader without John Kennedy's knowledge. This is not meant to suggest, of course, that President Kennedy minded in the least that his brother was willing to bear any burden in foreign policy-making, but it does raise some worrying questions about accountability and the potential power of an unelected official in cabinet.

The Trujillo episode, where Robert Kennedy took charge in Washington, was presumably a strong reaction to what had happened the previous month, when the Kennedy administration suffered its greatest embarrassment at the Bay of Pigs. The

Kennedys thought they had been led into the disastrous invasion by experts who were badly informed, and John Kennedy's instant reaction when news began to reach him that the assault on Cuba had failed was to tell his assistant Kenneth O'Donnell: "I should have had Bobby in on this from the start."¹²

After the April debacle, Bobby was in on every major foreign policy decision President Kennedy made. After the Bay of Pigs, "I then became involved on every major and all the international questions," he recalled in 1964.¹³

The Bay of Pigs invasion was a classic example of the Kennedys' thinking on how best to cope with Communist revolutions. They had, after all, learned in 1951 that struggles for national liberation could be achieved by guerrillas operating out of small units in unconventional warfare.

To combat this, the Kennedys, and especially Robert, were drawn to the idea of counter-insurgency techniques. This fitted well with the athletic but intellectual image of the administration. Robert Kennedy was particularly associated with the elite counter-insurgents, the Green Berets - top soldiers who would be able to compete with guerrillas on their own terms and on their own terrain. The Kennedys encouraged Third World military experts - even ambassadors - to read up on local guerrilla techniques. John Kennedy urged his generals to read Guevara and Mao. The Green Berets were the American answer to the Communist guerrillas and were regarded with a special awe in the administration.

They were viewed, as David Halberstam notes, "as

brilliant, young, great physical specimens in their green berets, swinging through the trees, you know, arm in arm, and speaking six languages, including Chinese and Russian, and who had Ph.Ds in history and literature, and ate snake meat at night".¹⁴

Robert Kennedy was much taken with the idea of the Green Berets, and even when their military effectiveness was largely discredited a few years later, and they had failed to make any significant headway in Vietnam, he still kept a green beret behind his chair in his Senate office. The idea that American soldiers, if they tried hard enough, could eventually become guerrillas, living off the land just as the enemy did, was a fatally flawed one. The Bay of Pigs proved that no matter how well trained the troops, they could not function without local support.

The difference between guerrillas, who fight for an cause which they believe is long-term and political, and commandoes, who are fight for a medium-term military solution, or for money or prestige, is a fundamental one. The Kennedys, like many US military experts at the time, apparently believed that a commando could fight on equal terms with a revolutionary if he mastered the revolutionary's language and terrain.

However, by failing to recognise the crucial difference in motivation between the Green Berets and, say, the Viet Cong, John and Robert Kennedy typified American inexperience in such matters. Guerrilla warfare did not begin with Guevara or Mao. It had its roots (as the Kennedys should certainly have known) with Michael Collins' new-look IRA in

the early 1920s. Collins' "flying columns" worked in small units in Irish cities and rural areas, and scored small-scale, but psychologically damaging, military victories against the British.

Collins' techniques were later taken up by Shamir and others agitating for Israeli independence. Although the Americans experienced added problems of a tropical climate in trying to combat enemies in Latin America and Asia during the 1960s, these were not problems which, if overcome, would have enabled the Americans to police the regions effectively.

American foreign policy experts apparently believed that American failures were more a problem of weather conditions than ideology. The Kennedys, at least, realised that a hearts and minds battle was eventually decisive, and made some attempt - through the Alliance for Progress - to counter the desire for Communist revolution in the first place.

At least in dealing with Latin America the Kennedys (and it would appear that on Latin American issues it was Robert as much as John who formulated official policy) could draw on a tradition of experience within the State Department. Unlike the rest of the world, Latin America was not uncharted territory for the new superpower. It had regarded the region as its legitimate sphere of interest for well over a century, and the famous Monroe Doctrine (enunciated by President Monroe in 1823 when he warned European powers that any expansion in Latin America would be regarded as dangerous to US interests) still proved the

basis for Washington's special interest in its southern neighbours.

During the Second World War, relations between the US and Latin America proved strong. In an effort to combat Nazi infiltration into the region, President Roosevelt had acted as an extremely friendly neighbour, and had successfully avoided any dangerous instability in Central or South America through a series of non-intervention pacts he signed with countries in the region. The Alliance for Progress was an extension of this tradition. The Kennedys, in sharp contrast to their successors, thought that America's self interest was best served by friendly liberal democracies in Latin America, rather than pliant but vulnerable dictators (although the Kennedys were not romantic enough to prefer a Communist regime over a pliant tyrant).

"I think I might have gotten more involved in Latin America myself...in the second term, anyway," Robert Kennedy said in 1964, although between 1961 and 1963 he had already been fairly heavily involved - in the Trujillo episode, in the immediate aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion and, most famously, in the Cuban missile crisis.¹⁵

In the days after the Bay of Pigs operation, it was Robert Kennedy who took charge of getting the prisoners taken by Castro back to the US, and organised for various ransoms to be paid. This, although a delicate job, was not a crucial one in terms of power or world security. However, there is some evidence to show that his actions on the initiative were unilateral and had not been cleared with the President (again, this is not to suggest that JFK

disapproved of the plans, but merely serves to indicate the extent of Robert Kennedy's licence on foreign policy).

As Arthur Schlesinger records, the Attorney General "proposed an exchange of \$28 million worth of agricultural products for the prisoners. This was peculiarly his initiative. On the evening of April 5 [1962], I noted in my journal, 'the President called me at 7 o'clock to find out what the Food-for-Prisoners deal is all about. This is an operation which ...is strongly backed by BobbyWe had all assumed that the President knew about it, but apparently no-one had told him' ".¹⁶

Within months of the Bay of Pigs disaster, the Kennedy administration set about re-establishing American credentials in the region, with a meeting at Punta del Este in Uruguay, which formally established the Alliance for Progress.

Robert Kennedy's involvement in the Alliance later provided him with his first grounds for attacking the Johnson administration, and during his Senate years provided an opportunity bettered only by Vietnam to distance himself from the new President, and suggest that Johnson had betrayed the ideals of the Kennedy administration.

The Alliance for Progress reflected the Kennedys' ideas for a liberal alternative to Communism which, if it could not be achieved through the electoral process, could be helped along with counter-insurgency techniques. It was a series of trade agreements and objectives in which the participants recognised the need for democratic reform. US military aid to countries which shared these objectives of

reform would be increased, while military aid to repressive regimes would be cut.

By the end of his career, Robert Kennedy's position on Latin American affairs had shifted considerably from the early days, and many of his ideas in 1967 and 1968 were to prove years ahead of their time, but in 1961 he believed that the Communist threat could be countered by an immediate alleviation of poverty and the promise of democratic elections.

These were not ignoble ideas in themselves, but getting Latin American dictatorships to agree to elections proved difficult, for in the end the dictators knew that, if faced with a choice between supporting them or risking a Communist overthrow, Washington would put its support behind the anti-Communist, regardless of his government's record on poverty or human rights.

Che Guevara called the initiative "an alliance of one millionaire and 20 beggars", and it was inevitable that such a Washington-led proposal would be weighted heavily towards US interests.¹⁷ However, the Kennedy administration believed that stable democracies in the region were in America's best interests, and for a while it appeared as though the Alliance could bring about significant improvements in standards of living for many Latin Americans. During the Kennedy administration, the 2:1 proportion of military to humanitarian aid to the region was reversed, so that by 1963 twice as much humanitarian aid was being sent as military aid, a trend which would not be carried on during the Johnson years.

By March 1964, the new Johnson appointment for the region, Thomas Mann, told a meeting of US ambassadors to Latin America that they should not continue in their criticisms of human rights in the countries where they worked. President Kennedy's policies, he said, showed how fruitless it was to impose democracy on Latin America, and he urged greater emphasis on national security interests.¹⁸

An early test of the Alliance came with the assassination of Trujillo. After the overthrow of the dictator (with or without US complicity), Washington was convinced that it had to ensure prompt elections for its policy to maintain credibility.

In December 1962 Juan Bosch, a left wing reformer, was duly elected in the first free elections in the Dominican Republic for 30 years. The election's success relied on substantial US political and economic involvement in the process, and proved a good advertisement for JFK's policy for the region.

When Washington received reports from the US ambassador in the summer of '62 that the "government has lost control of the streets to the Communists", who threatened to disrupt the elections, the President asked Robert Kennedy to organise a special counter-insurgency unit to sort out the problem.¹⁹

The Attorney General immediately dispatched two American policemen who had been trained at one of the counter-insurgency schools to Santo Domingo, and order was restored. "The same [happened] in Venezuela," Robert Kennedy remembered two years later. "They sent three fellows down to

Venezuela [to restore order]. It's incredible what just a few people can do."²⁰

The Dominican situation, far from being a model for other Latin American countries to follow, however, soon exposed important flaws in the Alliance for Progress. Newly-elected President Bosch was regarded by many in his country as an American puppet, installed for the benefit of the Kennedy administration. To combat the threat of armed insurrection, Bosch had to call on Washington for more and more military aid, which in turn fortified allegations of pro-Americanism.

This spiral of military aid from Washington provoking criticism of Bosch, which resulted in more military aid from Washington, went on until he was overthrown in a coup in September 1963. Elsewhere, the Alliance had positive results. In some places it improved conditions for many people, and even Castro declared in 1963 that "it was a good idea, ... a very intelligent strategy".²¹

Although Robert Kennedy was highly influential in US actions in the region during the Kennedy administration, he only visited Latin America for 24 hours during the whole of his brother's presidency, when he was sent at the end of '62 to bolster the Alliance on a trip to Brazil.

It was, of course, Cuba which attracted his attention during these years, and his foreign policy reputation during the Senate years was largely based on his involvement in the missile crisis of October 1962.

It is indicative of Robert Kennedy's real and perceived influence on foreign policy matters in the Kennedy administration that most studies on the subject afford him

as much credit, or blame, for US actions during the missile crisis as they do the President. Khrushchev, reflecting on the crisis afterwards, recalled that the Americans "had, on the whole, been open and candid with us, especially Robert Kennedy".²² Harold Macmillan said in 1969 that "the way Bobby and his brother played [their] hand was absolutely masterly".²³

Given his extraordinary lack of foreign policy experience, and the limits of his official job as Attorney General, his serious involvement in the crisis is truly remarkable. Nevertheless, Robert Kennedy had, by the time of the crisis in October '62, had already cultivated an unconventional channel of communication with the Soviet government.

In mid-1961, a New York journalist introduced Robert Kennedy to Georgi Bolshakov, who worked for the Soviet embassy's public relations department. Robert Kennedy later described Bolshakov as "Khrushchev's representative", and claimed that the Soviet leader used to send messages to the US President through Bolshakov, who would pass them to John Kennedy via the Attorney General.²⁴

"Most of the major matters dealing with the Soviet Union and the United States were discussed and arrangements made between Georgi Bolshakov and myself," said Robert Kennedy in 1964. "I met with him about whether the [Vienna summit] meeting should take place, whether the President wanted to meet Khrushchev....When they were concerned about Berlin, he would come to me and talk about that..."²⁵

Such message-carrying duties were all part of the network

of communications which governments build up during the course of diplomatic negotiations, but this one gave Robert Kennedy highly privileged access to the most secret information, some of which presumably was only ever known by Bolshakov, Khrushchev, President Kennedy and the Attorney General. "I don't know why they [the Soviets] wanted to proceed in that fashion, but they didn't want to go through their Ambassador [Mikhail Menshikov] evidently," Robert Kennedy noted.²⁶

By the time of the missile crisis, Robert Kennedy had enjoyed over a year of fortnightly meetings with Bolshakov, and so was much more familiar with the way Khrushchev conducted business than many experts on Soviet relations who relied on official State Department channels for their information. "The State Department didn't like having him [meet with me] much because this involved circumventing them, I suppose," admitted Kennedy.²⁷

President Kennedy was first shown evidence of Soviet missiles in Cuba as he sat on his bed in his dressing gown, reading the papers on the morning of October 16, 1962. His initial reaction was to call the Attorney General, who was informed at 9am. Later that day, other senior officials were filled in on what US spy planes had located. Roughly the same group which was later briefed in the cabinet room met almost continuously over the next 12 days to analyse the problem.

Robert Kennedy was already first among equals in the group, which became called ExComm (the Executive Committee of the National Security Council). It was the Attorney

General who oversaw the committee's deliberations, and whose personal recommendations were eventually accepted by the President as the best policy proposals.

Both John and Robert Kennedy were initially keen to explore the idea of invading Cuba. During the two ExComm meetings held on October 16, Robert Kennedy said little, although in the first he pointed out to the President that an invasion was one of the options, and asked General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, how long an invasion would take to carry out.²⁸

In the second, the Attorney General opposed the idea of a surgical air strike and endorsed an invasion. A tape of the meeting reveals that Robert Kennedy wondered "whether it wouldn't be, uh, the argument, if you're going to get into it [Cuba] at all, uh, whether we should just get into it and get it over with and say that, uh, take our losses". Then he suggested that "there is some other way we can get involved in this through, uh, Guantanamo Bay or something, er, or whether there's some ship that, you know, sink the Maine again [US battleship that blew up off Havana in 1898] or something" (ie engineer an incident which can be used as a pretext for invading Cuba).²⁹

No immediate decision was taken, however, and over the next few days Robert Kennedy strongly suggested that a "quarantine" or blockade should be undertaken rather than an air strike. In arguing against a strike on the Cuban missile bases, Robert Kennedy appealed to the moral conscience of the group. "For 175 years we have not been that kind of country. A sneak attack was not in our traditions," said

Kennedy³⁰ (although of course it was³¹).

Robert Kennedy's next decisive intervention in the crisis was his suggestion to the President to ignore an aggressively-worded letter sent by Khrushchev and respond to another one received some hours earlier, and also sent by the Soviet premier. The first letter asked that President Kennedy promise not to invade Cuba, in return for which the Soviets would remove their missiles. The second was more formally worded, and demanded that NATO missiles based in Turkey be removed before any solution could be found.

Until the time of Robert Kennedy's death, the official US version of events was that the Attorney General's inspired idea to ignore the second letter had saved the day without a loss of face for the Americans. Dissatisfied with the official State Department response to the correspondence, Robert Kennedy criticised its hard-line approach and, at the President's suggestion, personally drafted an alternative response which offered a no-invasion of Cuba guarantee to the Soviets. It was this letter, the story goes, which convinced the Soviets that they were being offered a reasonable deal and were not likely to squeeze any more concessions out of the administration.

In fact, Robert Kennedy recorded the true version a few months before he died in his account of the incident, 13 Days, when he reveals that he struck a deal with the Soviets based on the terms of the second letter, without NATO, the US Congress, or even his ExComm colleagues knowing about it.

The details of the solution were apparently known only to Robert Kennedy and the President. 13 Days, which was

published posthumously, reveals that Robert Kennedy met with the Soviet Ambassador (now Anatoly Dobrynin) and agreed that the NATO Jupiter missiles would be removed.

Douglas Dillon, Secretary of the Treasury and ExComm member, later noted that "I was there, and I don't recall the ExComm telling Bobby Kennedy anything very specific about what he should say to Dobrynin. He got his last-minute and final instructions from the President and only from the President. There would be no written record of this."³² The ExComm was not even briefed about the Robert Kennedy/Dobrynin encounter the next day.

Dobrynin reported that "Robert Kennedy looked exhausted. One could see from his eyes that he had not slept for days. He himself said he had not been home for six days and nights. 'The President is in a grave situation,' Robert Kennedy said, 'and he does not know how to get out of it. We are under very severe stress. In fact we are under pressure from our military to use force against Cuba.'"³³ As Robert Kennedy remembered it, he told Dobrynin that "it was our judgement that, within a short time after this crisis was over, those [NATO] missiles would be gone", and they were.³⁴

Arthur Schlesinger, while heaping laurels on Robert Kennedy for his intelligence in dealing with the crisis, describes the deal struck with Dobrynin as "a singular exercise in secret diplomacy".³⁵ The difference between the earlier version of how the situation was resolved and the fuller, posthumous one, is crucial when studying Robert Kennedy's Senate career and presidential chances.

Much of his reputation as a tough, decisive politician

rested on the belief that he and his brother had not given way over the Cuban missile crisis, had stood eyeball to eyeball with the Soviets, and had not flinched. In fact, Secretary of State Dean Rusk later criticised Robert Kennedy for being too emotional during the episode. "This was the first major crisis he had ever lived through. Fortunately, that emotional aspect was not the controlling mood of President Kennedy. He was as calm as an iceberg throughout this situation. The difference in the emotional overtone between Bobby and John was very important to me."³⁶

The CIA photo expert who showed Robert Kennedy the U2 pictures of the missiles in Cuba also remembered the Attorney General's agitated state. "He walked around the room like a boxer between rounds, thumbing his nose and uttering epithets."³⁷

Nevertheless, it was the reputation as a steely advisor to the President which survived, and Robert Kennedy was never forced to prove his anti-Communist credentials during his Senate career. The tough image made his suggestions of negotiations over Vietnam, and offers of blood to the Viet Cong, more credible to the public than if they had come from someone who was regarded as soft on Communism.

The truth was, of course, that the Kennedys had struck a deal with the Soviets, and had given away more than had originally been admitted to. None of this was known to his New York constituents, however, during Robert Kennedy's Senate career.

The low-income, white, urban and mid-western whites who were attracted to Kennedy during the presidential primaries

did not know it either, and such issues were traditionally very important to them. Many Poles, for example, might have been surprised to learn that Robert Kennedy had struck secret bargains with the Soviets. None of this would be so important, of course, had not Kennedy's appeal in the 1968 presidential primaries rested so heavily on his hard-guy image which attracted the ethnic whites. In this sense at least, his much-vaunted "poverty coalition" between poor whites and blacks was founded on an untruth.

During his early days in the Senate, before his break with the White House over Vietnam, Robert Kennedy's reputation on international affairs rested largely on his dealings with Cuba and other Latin American countries. However, he had gained virtually all of his knowledge of the region second-hand. He had been sent on various missions elsewhere in the world, though, and was establishing himself in the world community as an international trouble-shooter for President Kennedy.

His first official trip abroad for his brother came in August 1961, when he visited President Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast. Boigny had been to Washington earlier in the year was dissatisfied with the treatment he had received from the State Department. It was left to Robert Kennedy to patch things up and make the August trip for Ivorian independence celebrations.

Other trips followed, including a sweep of Asia which took up the whole of February 1962. He visited Japan, where the US ambassador noted that when he needed advice or help in a hurry, he would in future call the Attorney General

instead of going through the State Department.

The main purpose of the 1962 mission was to force the Dutch and Indonesians to negotiate over Indonesian independence. Kennedy believed his trip was successful: "Nobody had visited Indonesia. I went to offset what was happening there...I did get [Sukarno] to agree to sit down with the DutchThey avoided a war."³⁸

By mid-administration, Robert Kennedy was almost functioning as a mini-State Department, negotiating in secret with Khrushchev's representative, acting as an alternative channel for ambassadors to reach the President, and bringing peace to the parts other officials had failed to reach.

Significantly, too, during that 14-nation trip in February, he stopped briefly in Saigon. "We are going to win in Vietnam. We will remain here until we do win," he told the crowd at the airport.³⁹

NOTES

I - THE WHITE HOUSE YEARS

1. Congressional Record January 21 1965 p1030. Speech to Senate chamber.
2. In His Own Words p31
3. Schlesinger p92
4. Gurtov p41. Speech to Senate chamber.
5. Louis & Bull p288
6. Geyer p240
7. No. 2 p320
8. No. 2 p32
9. No. 2 p270
10. No.2 p321
11. No. 2 p326
12. Schlesinger p417
13. No. 2 p249
14. Brown p37
15. No. 2 p297
16. Schlesinger p469
17. To Seek a Newer World p108
18. Lieuwen p146
19. No. 2 p257
20. Ibid
21. Schlesinger p577
22. Khrushchev in Pope, p137
23. Schlesinger p532

24. No. 2 p258

25. Ibid

26. Ibid

27. Ibid

28. From Belligerent Beginnings, by Mark White in Journal of Strategic Studies, March 1992. White's essay is a splendid study of the initial reactions of the President and his cabinet to the crisis. JFK and RFK, it appears, were among the most aggressive ExComm members that first day, both enthusiastic about military action against the Cubans.

29. Ibid

30. 13 Days, p90

31. Robert Kennedy argument that a surprise attack was against American traditions was obviously nonsense. The nation was founded on a sneak attack carried out by George Washington. Ignoring military protocol, Washington led his troops across the Delaware River on Christmas Day, 1776 and launched an attack on British troops who had camped there for the winter. Attacks on Indians carrying truce flags were not uncommon a hundred years later, and during the Second World War British and German fighter pilots were astonished to witness US planes killing enemy air crew who were parachuting to the ground. The shooting of defenceless parachutists defied the European code of conduct, and was first introduced by American pilots. Nevertheless, RFK's allusion to some fictitious legacy of moral superiority in military matters appears to have had some impact on the ExComm.

32. Douglas Dillon in Blight and Welch p66

- 33. Dobrynin in Blight p142
- 34. Ibid, no.2
- 35. Schlesinger p509
- 36. Rusk in Blight and Welch p180
- 37. CIA photo expert, as quoted in BBC TV documentary "CIA",
July 1992
- 38. Ibid, no2
- 39. Schlesinger p712

V - FOREIGN POLICY: THE POLITICS OF DISSENT

"He's come too far, too fast." - President Johnson of
RFK, May 1967.

AT THE END of his brother's administration, Robert Kennedy was an acknowledged expert on foreign affairs. The career options he seriously considered after President Kennedy's assassination all involved foreign affairs. In 1964, President Johnson offered him the post of US Ambassador to the UN, and although he declined it, Robert Kennedy mentioned that he was prepared to be Ambassador to Saigon.

Johnson was not keen on this, however, and so Kennedy opted for the Senate - not out of a burning desire to represent the people of New York - but, as he confided in 1964, because as a senator he would be in a stronger position to criticise Johnson's foreign policy. "...if he's not doing anything for the Alliance for Progress, or if he's

not paying proper attention to Panama or Brazil....If I was in the United States Senate, I would have raised a fuss about [US military intervention in] Panama," he said.¹

Once elected, Senator Kennedy did not have to wait long before an opportunity to attack President Johnson's handling of affairs in Latin America presented itself. The situation in the Dominican Republic had worsened since the overthrow of Bosch in September 1963. Following the coup, the Kennedy administration had shut off all military aid to the new right-wing regime, but this policy was soon reversed by President Johnson.

The unpopular authoritarian government on the Caribbean island, backed by the military, found itself the target of an uprising in April 1965. Johnson, alarmed at the prospect of a Communist takeover, ordered 22,000 US troops into the country to restore order. He had not consulted with the Organisation of American States, and his action provided Kennedy with ammunition for his first open assault on the President.

Ironically enough, it was during a debate on Vietnam that Kennedy first broke with the administration over the Dominican Republic. On May 6, 1965, Kennedy rose to speak on a request from Johnson that more money be made available for the war in Vietnam. After agreeing to vote for the request (although warning that it should not be seen as a "blank cheque" by the administration), Kennedy used his time on the Senate floor to bring up the Dominican situation.

"Our determination to stop Communist revolution in the hemisphere must not be construed as opposition to popular

uprisings against injustice and oppression just because the targets of such popular uprisings say they are Communist-inspired or Communist-led, or even because known Communists take part in them," he declared.²

I.F.Stone's Weekly picked up on the significance of the speech with characteristic perception. "Taken in connection with Teddy Kennedy's leadership in the fight against Johnson on poll taxes, we have here the possible nucleus of a liberal opposition to Johnson," he wrote the week after the speech.³ Stone was to prove a regular and incisive critic of Kennedy in the following years, and he often used his influential newsletter to prod the senator towards a more forthright stand against Vietnam.

Later that year, Kennedy visited Latin America for his first substantial political trip to the region. In keeping with his habit of ignoring State Department procedure, he visited the universities and labour gatherings he had been warned against. In Chile, he met Communists in a mine and declared: "If I worked in this mine I'd be a Communist too."⁴

Elsewhere, in Argentina, Brazil and Peru, he witnessed the demise of the Alliance for Progress ideal of putting America on the side of social revolution. Johnson had not maintained the former policy of encouraging reform, and it had been replaced with the old line of anti-Communism at any cost.

At the end of his first year in the Senate, he appeared on Meet the Press and warned that "if all we do... is to associate ourselves with those forces which are against

subversion and against Communism and have rather a negative policy, then I think it is self-defeating".⁵

The reversion to the old policy of the primacy of national security considerations was made complete within a year or so of Johnson taking power, and was reflected in a piece in Le Monde in March 1966, which warned that LBJ's policy of siding with the dictators "spelled the end of Kennedyism".⁶

Within months of this article appearing,, Kennedy made an all-out attack on what he regarded as a betrayal of the Alliance for Progress principles. It should be remembered that when he made the speech, in May '66, he had already broken with the administration's policy on Vietnam, when he had urged negotiations with the National Liberation Front. The Vietnam break, which had come in February, generated considerable press attention, and by comparison the declaration on Latin America caused only minor ripples.

What precipitated Kennedy's outburst on the Latin American question was Johnson's decision to appoint Lincoln Gordon, a former Ambassador to Brazil who had advocated the overthrow of the progressive Brazilian government by its military, as his Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American affairs.

In remarks to the Senate in May 9-10, in what Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon lauded as "the most important speech that has been made on Latin American problems...in the country since President Kennedy initiated the Alliance for Progress...", Kennedy restated the original aims of the plan and pointed out where they were not being pursued.⁷

"If we had dealt with Cuba and Batista in the fifties we would not have to worry about Castro," he said.⁸ He went on to criticise the State Department for withholding aid from Peru when the Peruvian government was in dispute with a US oil company. Kennedy pointed out that no expropriation had taken place, and that the President of Peru was simply looking for a better tax deal from the oil companies working in his country.

The senator also pointed out similar cases in Argentina, and attacked hold-ups in aid disbursement where, "for approximately two years, both in Peru and Argentina, important aid projects under the Alliance for Progress were held up because the private US companies were not able to reach agreement with the representatives of the governments of Argentina and Peru".⁹

It was, of course, his first break with Johnson over Vietnam which really caused a furore. Presuming that Kennedy was keen to distance himself from the administration wherever appropriate, and thereby begin to establish an independent political base from which to launch a bid for the presidency, a break with Johnson over Vietnam was a logical step.

However, at this time, early 1966, the country was overwhelmingly in support of the winning the war, and Kennedy was saddled with the further burden of having advocated that exact policy himself during his brother's administration, and had personally made ringing declarations of US intent to stay and defeat the enemy during his trip to Saigon in 1962.

He had not opposed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which gave Johnson almost unlimited powers to pursue his war aims, and as late as June 1965 was asking that magazine articles which emphasised the heroism of US troops in combat with the Viet Cong be inserted in the Congressional Record.

By the end of 1965, however, there was no mistaking that Johnson was prepared to increase substantially America's involvement in the war. In the last six months of that year, he had increased the number of US troops in Vietnam from 75,000 in July to 185,000 in December. When Kennedy made his speech in 1966, US bombing, which had been halted since Christmas Eve, 1965, had just resumed.

The build-up to Senator Kennedy's first major statement on Vietnam suggests that he was interested in staking out an identifiable political patch for himself which would be independent of the administration, but would not alienate mainstream Democrats who would ultimately determine his presidential aspirations.

This dilemma never left Kennedy, of course, and dogged him right up to end of his career. The tension between independence and disloyalty was a difficult one with which to deal, and he never really mastered it. He had tested the water some months earlier, when in October 1965 he proposed that blood plasma be given to the enemy as a humanitarian gesture. The suggestion was used throughout the next three years to associate him with appeasement, with a small degree of success.

Undeterred, he decided to associate himself with those dissenting on the war. This was not easy, however, for

despite all his experience in foreign affairs, he was still a very junior senator, and had not been selected to sit on any of the glamorous foreign affairs committees.

He stood frustrated at the back of the hearings into the war conducted by the Foreign Relations Committee in the first two weeks of February 1966, astutely associating himself with the proceedings in the minds of the press and public without actually being part of them. His aides remember how he "several times went to the hearing room and stood among the listening spectators".¹⁰ The hearings were shown live on the television, but Kennedy preferred to attend in person and so publicly associate himself with the debate in this way.

His statement, when it came, made an enormous splash. He began by claiming the tradition of Abraham Lincoln, who "was reviled for opposing the war of 1848", and in a gesture to his father's record, mentioned those who had advocated fuller debate before World War Two.¹¹ Then he spoke out against the resumption of the bombing and then finally spelled out his ideas for peace.

The proposal itself sought to set out terms for negotiation with the Communists in Vietnam. "If negotiation is our aim, as we have so clearly said it is, we must seek a middle ground. A negotiated settlement means that each side must concede matters that are important in order to preserve positions that are essential...we must be willing to face the uncertainties of election, and the possibility of an eventual vote on reunification".¹²

Although nowhere in his speech did Kennedy mention the

word coalition, most commentators agreed he was advocating just that. Izzy Stone could not contain his enthusiasm for the the break, welcoming the speech as "a political event of the first magnitude", and publishing a special edition of his weekly to include Kennedy's remarks in full.¹³

The rest of the press also regarded it as a highly significant statement, and many influential columnists took their cue. Walter Lippmann in the Washington Post enthused: "It has remained for Senator Kennedy to raise the decisive question about a negotiated settlement...a negotiated settlement of the war in South Vietnam will have to be negotiated by the South Vietnamese, and our policy should be to refrain from vetoing it".¹⁴

The New York Times chose to regard the statement as a helpful suggestion for the administration, rather than an attack on it: "Senator Kennedy's proposal...is less a criticism of the President's policies than an invaluable contribution to the decision-making process",¹⁵ while the Washington Star reported Vice-President Hubert Humphrey's reaction to the statement, when he compared allowing Communists to join a coalition government to "putting a fox in the chicken coop".¹⁶

Other administration officials were also unenthusiastic. McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson's principal White House advisor on foreign affairs, described them as "neither useful nor helpful".¹⁷ Under Secretary of State George Ball denounced the proposals to negotiate with Communists with a view to power-sharing as "unacceptable".

However, all of the senior Johnson officials who opposed

the idea had all been in favour of coalition when President Kennedy sought peace on Laos in 1961 on that very basis. Among the participants of the National Security Council meeting which advocated bringing Communists into the Laos government were Vice-President Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Ball and Bundy. All of them went along with President Kennedy's efforts to establish a popular front in Laos.

The New Statesman likened Kennedy's February statement to a "ministerial resignation".¹⁸ In a piece headlined "Kennedy ends the consensus", it proclaimed: "Kennedy has, in one stroke, made the unthinkable thinkable: getting out of Vietnam....Kennedy has made opposition to the war...politically possible", while The Spectator recorded that Kennedy, in making his speech, had "chosen internal exile".¹⁹

In an interview with US News & World Report two weeks after the speech, Kennedy sought to clarify his position. "One of the facts of life... is that the Communists...will play some role in the Government of a negotiated settlement....They've been around a long time and they have considerable support in the villages...[South Vietnamese premier] General Ky has said he has complete control over only 25 per cent of the population at the present time".²⁰

Senate doves welcomed the statement. Wayne Morse, a long-standing critic of the war, expressed "enthusiastic support for the general policy expressed by the junior senator from New York,"²¹ while Claiborne Pell played down the differences between what Kennedy was proposing and the

administration's policy, claiming the differences were "slight". Pell did credit Kennedy with having established "the irreducible minimums on each side and [having] highlighted the areas where negotiation could be conducted".²²

Kennedy had made the unthinkable thinkable - he had put a coalition solution on the political agenda, as only few politicians could have. When Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota had advanced the same idea some weeks before, he noted ruefully that it had been considered so "far out" that nobody noticed. It would not be the last time for McCarthy to be so upstaged.

Journalists sympathetic to Kennedy's ideas even sought out former Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy, who had headed the coalition government in that country at the end of World War Two. Although Nagy was overthrown by Communists who formed part of that coalition, he came in on Kennedy's side during the national debate.

"A coalition...of the participating political parties or groups is not dependent at all on domestic popular support but on the help of the outside great powers which are behind them politically," he offered.²³ That Nagy's thoughts on such a topic were considered so relevant by the American press gives some indication of how Vietnam was regarded in the overall context of the Cold War, and seen as easily comparable to the Hungarian situation of 20 years before.

Kennedy, meanwhile, wished to be seen as part of a general movement unhappy about the conduct of the war, but did not want to go as far as publicly joining its leaders.

He was careful only to make a speech, and not call for it to be debated as a Senate resolution, which would have caused a more serious split with the White House. The following month, he did not vote for a motion which called for the repeal of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (Eugene McCarthy did).

In April, he warned of further escalation, and in July voted for a bill introduced by Senator Fulbright to put three members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the Armed Services Committee (which oversees CIA activities). Although the bill failed, it provided some indication of Kennedy's continuing dovishness on the war.

The second half of 1966 appears to have been a most indecisive time for Robert Kennedy. No doubt distracted by a trip to Africa, mid-term elections and the need to tip-toe around internecine political struggles in New York, his public comments on the war were relatively rare.

It was a time, too, when he was being mooted in some very reputable quarters as a vice-presidential possibility for Johnson in the '68 election, and he was certainly reluctant to go any further than his February statement in attacking the administration's foreign policy. In early 1967 he seems to have decided that the most prudent course was a decisive, final break with Johnson over Vietnam, but for the remainder of 1966 he frustrated doves with his apparent reluctance to address the war. The New Statesman noted in July of that year that "...opposition to the war is generally expressed in testimonials of faith in Senator Robert Kennedy. In his turn, he responds with inscrutable smiles and delphic

comments....He did not sign [a motion critical of the administration's Vietnam policy] with the 18 doves - for no very good reason, except that he was late getting into the Senate chamber."²⁴

The Spectator, meanwhile, thought it sensed a subtle bid for the vice-presidency in 1968. A June Gallup Poll had shown Johnson's popularity rating slip to below 50% for the first time since he became President, and a month later another poll in California suggested that Kennedy was preferred to Johnson by a margin of 2:1.

"The chances are that he [LBJ] will come to 1968 badly in need of a new face...under the circumstances, it would be by no means surprising if he dismissed the loyal Mr Humphrey and accepted the distrusted Senator Kennedy as his vice-presidential candidate," predicted The Spectator.²⁵ "This would be the most unpleasant dose imaginable for him...but there is almost nothing he would not do to make safe an election," it concluded, in an oblique reference to Johnson's capacity for distorting ballot returns.

Ruminations about Robert Kennedy's long-term political ambitions seem to have been all the rage that summer. The Spectator went as far as to publish a 3,000 word article in September, mapping out the senator's various options in some detail.²⁶ It concluded that the chances of Johnson asking Kennedy to join the ticket were "dubious", and the chances of Kennedy accepting such an offer "uncertain". Kennedy seems to have been uncertain about many political decisions that year, and wisely appears to have been keeping as many options open for as long as possible.

If the February speech had opened the door to his championing a significant anti-Vietnam movement which might sweep him to the presidency in 1972, or even before, he had been careful not to push the door so forcefully that it would close any possibility of a reconciliation with Johnson, should the senator decide to make a gambit for the vice-presidency in '68.

Not showing his hand was no doubt frustrating for those, like Izzy Stone, who wanted him to throw in his lot with the doves and make an irrevocable break. "While others dodge the draft, Bobby dodges the war," he charged in an issue of October '66. "Kennedy in the US Senate has at his disposal a forum second only to that of the Presidency. But he hasn't said a word about the war in the Senate since last February....He even achieved the feat of delivering a speech in New York on October 11 without mentioning Vietnam!"²⁷

Stone also thought the vice-presidency theory credible. In September he had noted that Kennedy "has said very little about the war in months...[he is] being careful not to burn his bridges with the White House and make such a development [the vice-presidential nomination] impossible".²⁸

Kennedy was not given to unnecessary bridge-burning. He knew better than most what it took to become president and, assuming that objective was always an important one for him, he could not afford to make any more enemies than he needed to. Besides, if he had thrown in his hand with the anti-war protestors and become an all-out dove, what sort of movement would he be heading, and could he steer it towards a presidential victory?

The full implications of the war had still not hit home to most Americans by 1966. At the end of the year, it would be revealed that, for the first time, US casualties outnumbered those of the South Vietnamese in the conflict, but even that wasn't enough to persuade most Americans that the war could not, or should not, be won.

Media reports of the war were still overwhelmingly pro-administration at this time, the anti-Vietnam war movement remained unstructured politically, and was made up of several distinct factions, each wanting slightly different things.

Some who were opposed to the war were simply opposed to the way it was being run, and believed (as Nixon later tried) that a "Vietnamisation" policy, whereby the Vietnamese did all the fighting themselves, was the answer. Others questioned American ability to do the job, others Americans moral right to be there in the first place, and others still questioned the idea of war at all.

It must be stressed that the moral arguments of pacifism, or even of America's right to impose its will on the people of Vietnam, did not figure very prominently in the arguments put forward by the Senate doves during those years (although Kennedy himself, in March 1968, in a speech on the Senate floor, wondered aloud about America's moral right to act "like the God of the Old Testament",²⁸ and another time made the ludicrous statement that "what we are doing to the Vietnamese is not very different than [sic] what Hitler did to the Jews").²⁹

Most doves, however, simply wanted to end the war because

it was costing too much money and because America was losing it. When Kennedy did criticise the administration's policy on the war, he did it guardedly and via a related subject, usually an American citizen's right to dissent against it.

For example, when calls came for historian Eugene Genovese to be dismissed from his university post because he said he hoped the Viet Cong would win, Kennedy defended his right of free speech. Similarly, Ted Kennedy's criticism of the war concentrated on the issue of refugees rather than the moral question of whether the US should be fighting it at all.

It was a difficult time for Kennedy, who had so much to lose should he jump the wrong side of the fence on the war. If he went all-out against it, like Morse had, he would have become isolated from the mainstream party, and have only the anti-war movement (which had certainly not proven itself as an electoral force in 1966) on which to base his run at the presidency.

If, on the other hand, he refused to criticise Johnson publicly, he ran the risk of someone outflanking him on the left, and stealing much of his natural, radical constituency. Moreover, there was not just the presidency to worry about. He had hardly won New York by a landslide in 1964, and in the early years of his Senate career was still on trial in the eyes of many constituents.

There were convincing reasons for Kennedy to sit tight and wait out the political storm of the late '60s. Time was on his side - in 1984 he still would have been younger than Johnson was in '68 - and many Democrats urged him to wait

until the 1972 election before he made his move.

His hesitancy grated on those who knew him to be personally dissatisfied with the conduct of the war, however, and pressure on him grew steadily during the latter half of 1966 to declare publicly and forcefully against Johnson.

When General de Gaulle offered himself as a mediator between Washington and Hanoi in September of that year, Kennedy wrote a letter openly welcoming the French proposals for instant negotiations with a view to power-sharing. In an act typical of his prevarication in those months, he did not send it.

He held out against the pressure for a long time. In early October his first speech on the war since the February statement welcomed UN Ambassador Arthur Goldberg's suggestions for the Vietnamisation of the war. This, according to Stone, put him "safely back in LBJ's camp".

The statement helped confirm William Shannon's view, published in that month's edition of Harper's, that the vice-presidency theory was a strong one. "With skilful publicity this could be made to appear not as an act of bold usurpation and impatient ambition by Kennedy but a reluctant rescue mission to prop up an aging wartime President whose popularity is sagging," he proposed.³¹

As the autumn dragged on, so the pressure on Kennedy mounted. The anti-war movement, however, provided no clear evidence in the mid-term elections that it was a force which could unseat an incumbent president.

The senator remained in two minds. Privately, there was

no question that he was opposed to continuing military involvement, but told colleagues that to oppose the war more openly would only result in increased bombing, as Johnson would prove the independence of his policy by doing the exact opposite of what Kennedy proposed.

While he stalled, the war ground on in a peculiarly futile fashion. American inexperience in foreign affairs was exposed as never before. Johnson opted for the disastrous "strategic hamlet" policy, whereby people were removed from land their families had owned for generations, and put into hamlets where they could be protected from the Viet Cong. Unfortunately for Johnson, many locals believed American troops to be more of a menace than the Viet Cong, and the US never looked likely to win the battle for hearts and minds.

A basic misunderstanding of local needs and preferences punctuated American policy towards those it protected. When the Communists destroyed much of the South's rice harvest in the mid-'60s, the US rushed in California and Louisiana rice, only to find that the Vietnamese hated American rice so much that they used it instead of dirt to fill their sandbags.

It was during this summer of hesitancy that he decided to travel to Africa. Whatever he eventually did in the short term, a successful, high-profile foreign trip would do his chances of getting the vice-presidency, or challenging for the presidency itself, no harm at all.

America was becoming more and more unpopular throughout the world (a fact which Kennedy did not fail to mention on

his return), and the goodwill which President Kennedy had elicited was being steadily eroded.

Moreover, nothing emphasised the difference between Kennedy and Johnson more sharply than the sight of the young senator being mobbed by crowds in the Third World, while the President was besieged by anti-war protests at home and abroad.

Holding to the Kennedy administration theme of being on the side of the people during their revolutions, Senator Kennedy made for South Africa in June. The trip, which also included visits to Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia, produced a few good speeches from Kennedy and some excellent publicity.

His interest in Africa dated back to the 1961 mission to the Ivory Coast, and he had learned a lot since his first speech on the continent when, addressing an Ivoirien audience, he had described President Felix Houphouet-Boigny as "the George Washington of your country", presumably imagining that Boigny could envisage no higher honour.³²

Interestingly, his only altercation with President Kennedy over foreign policy concerned Africa. Robert Kennedy had argued against the US building the Volta Dam. The dam, which was to be built in Ghana, was in danger of being taken over by Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah who, the Attorney General argued, was "going Communist".³³ Robert Kennedy insisted that the money (\$96 million) should be spent on America's real friends in the region, like Boigny. In the end, President Kennedy's position prevailed, although he and the Attorney General "had some spirited arguments about it", as Robert Kennedy remembered in 1964.³⁴

After President Kennedy's death, he appeared genuinely concerned that Johnson was not paying enough attention to African matters. "I've had a major effort in the last four months to try to get somebody to do something about Zanzibar..." he complained at the end of 1964.³⁵ Presumably stung into action by Kennedy's trip, Johnson made his only Presidential speech on Africa the week before Kennedy left for Cape Town.

By 1966, the winds of change had almost swept right through the continent, with only a few countries left operating under minority rule. South Africa, with its archaic apartheid system but relatively sophisticated and liberal press, seemed an obvious place to generate the sort of attention Kennedy needed.

The trip duly confirmed his image as a world statesman, and a man of the people. President Kennedy had halted loans to the South African government, and forbidden any weapons deals with the Pretoria regime in protest at its policies, and Kennedy's credibility with the majority population was swiftly cemented with a trip to "banned" Nobel prize winner, Zulu chief Albert Luthuli.

Thanks to a developed media network in the country, Kennedy's trip made headlines across the world in a way which his stops in the other African nations couldn't manage. Although he was treated like a head of state by Nyrere in Tanzania, Kenyetta in Kenya and Selassie in Ethiopia, their poor press facilities did not generate the same impact as the South African leg.

The memory of the African trip was dominated by the

experience in South Africa, when thousands of blacks had cheered Kennedy for defying their government and speaking out against apartheid (the South African Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd declined to see him or permit other ministers to do so).

Kennedy was among the first foreign politician to attack the South African government on its own soil, and became an instant hero in the townships for doing so. By 1984, however, when his brother Ted attempted to rally anti-apartheid forces in the country, he was forced to cut his trip short in the face of militant black Azapo activists, who threatened to sabotage his meetings and accused him of being an "agent of American imperialism".³⁶

The 1966 trip also developed the idea of Kennedy as more than a one-issue wonder, disagreeing with Johnson on nothing but Vietnam. Part of Kennedy's problem at this time was his need to mark out his own political territory. If he opposed Johnson solely on the war, and the war ended, his political career would be finished. While he tried to develop a new philosophy to deal with racial problems on the domestic scene, he also had to try and carve out an alternative approach to foreign policy.

By the end of 1966, his mind apparently made up to break with Johnson rather than wait for the offer of the vice-presidency, he embarked on a sophisticated strategy geared to project himself as a worthy and experienced heir to Johnson, familiar with international events and more popular with foreign publics and governments than the President.

It was time for a decision. By December attacks on Kennedy's silence were reaching a crescendo, with Stone accusing him of "sounding like Hubert [Humphrey]".³⁷ At this time, too, his image was being damaged by a long-running battle with William Manchester over the author's account of the Dallas assassination, The Death of a President. Although Kennedy tried to stop extracts of the book from appearing on the grounds that they did not respect Jacqueline Kennedy's privacy, others thought that the most offensive passages were those which threatened his relations with Johnson.

Some of the manuscript, it appears, included evidence from Kennedy aides complaining about President Johnson's lack of sensitivity towards President Kennedy's family and colleagues in the way he took over at the White House.

If Kennedy was at all serious about the chances of a vice-presidential spot, he could not afford such revelations to be made public. Moreover, when the nature of the passages became common knowledge anyway, with drafts of the book circulating in New York and elsewhere, he was put under increasing pressure to make a decisive break with the administration.

He chose to make another speech on Vietnam in March, one which could only be construed as an all-out attack on the President's policies. For maximum impact, he gradually built up to the announcement with a well-publicised trip to Europe, which reinforced the idea that Kennedy was more in touch with attitudes in foreign capitals than Johnson was.

In January he left for London, where he met with Prime Minister Harold Wilson and discussed the possibility of

British entry in to the European Common Market. He was afforded the sort of welcome not usually extended to most senators, as most European government officials recognised they were probably dealing with a future president.

In France, he was told that a Communist government in Vietnam was inevitable. De Gaulle warned him that the US could not prevail against the forces of history which were at work in Vietnam. In Rome, Italian President Giuseppe Saragat told him that Johnson appeared to be neglecting his allies. In his State of the Union address to Congress two weeks before, the Italian premier noted, Johnson's speech had included 50 lines on Latin America, 20 on Africa and only one brief mention of Europe.

The message Kennedy brought home was clear: Johnson was out of touch with the rest of the world, unlike Kennedy, whose top-level discussions with the great European powers had helped convince him that the war was wrong.

Another message Kennedy brought home was not so clear. The confusion arose over a peculiar incident in Paris, when during discussions with an official from the French foreign ministry, terms of negotiation with the NLF had been mentioned. The US Ambassador to France, who was present at the meeting, thought Kennedy had been the target of a subtle "peace feeler", and relayed this information to the State Department.

The feeler was so subtle, apparently, that the senator did not pick it up at all, and was surprised at the fuss it caused. When news leaked that Kennedy might have been the recipient of such a signal, Johnson was furious, believing

Kennedy to have used the message to enhance his own prestige.

An acrimonious meeting took place between the President and Kennedy on the latter's return to the US. "I think the leak came from someone in your State Department," Kennedy is reported to have said.

"It's not my State Department, it's your State Department," Johnson is supposed to have shouted back, meaning, presumably, that it was staffed by Kennedy sympathisers who were more in agreement with the senator than the President.³⁸ This was a remarkable attitude for Johnson to adopt, since it not only confirmed the extent of Kennedy's influence, but also rested on the belief that Kennedy was a favourite in the Department, which he clearly had never been.

The meeting carried on, with Kennedy advising the President to stop the bombing and begin negotiations. His patience tested, Johnson eventually warned Kennedy that he would "destroy you and every one of your dove friends in six months. You'll be dead politically in six months." Kennedy stormed out angrily, according to his aides.³⁹ Unsurprisingly, the vice-presidency was not mentioned by either side.

The stage was set for Kennedy's break. Harried to the end by Izzy Stone, whose February 20 issue claimed that "even [New York's other senator, Republican Jacob] Javits is more outspoken than Kennedy on the bombing", Robert Kennedy's second major speech on Vietnam, and the one which separated him irrevocably from the administration, came on 2 March,

1967.⁴⁰

As always, the speech was only as effective as the publicity it generated. Johnson went to extraordinary lengths to divert attention away from it. As Kennedy aides William Vanden Heuvel and Milton Gwirtzman recall: "On the day of the speech...Johnson made two unscheduled speeches in Washington, held an unscheduled news conference to announce that Russian Premier Kosygin had agreed to talks on reducing the stockpile of nuclear weapons, announced he was inviting all the nation's governors to the White House, had Senator Henry Jackson of Washington read on the floor of the Senate a predated letter from him, explaining why the bombing was necessary, and confirmed the rumour that his daughter Lucy was pregnant."⁴¹

Despite his exertions, Kennedy's proposal was the lead item the next day. He proposed a unilateral bombing halt and an announcement that the US would be "ready to negotiate within a week". The negotiations, he suggested, could be secured by both sides agreeing not to substantially extend the war while talks were being conducted. He also recommended a gradual withdrawal of US and North Vietnamese troops, which would be replaced by an international peace-keeping force, which would also guarantee free elections in which the Viet Cong would participate.

Before he made his speech Kennedy consulted with Tom Hayden and Staughton Lynd, two radical anti-war activists who had recently returned from Hanoi, but his statement was essentially a restatement of the orthodox dove line. No-one in the Senate at this time was calling for a unilateral

withdrawal of American troops, and the country was still overwhelmingly in support of winning the war.

In a Gallup poll published the week before Kennedy made his speech, only 24% of the public said they favoured a halt in the bombing, and by May of that year most college students questioned by Gallup said they considered themselves hawks on Vietnam.

The press reaction to the speech, although extensive, was less enthusiastic than it had been about his declaration in February '66. Commentators were now more wary of Kennedy's intentions in breaking with Johnson, and many agreed with The Spectator, which noted that Kennedy had "a way of speaking and then lapsing into long silences".⁴² A fortnight before, the magazine had described him as "a concealed and sporadic enemy [of the President]: he emerges every six months or so openly to express an otherwise muted discontent."⁴³

Few publications applauded the bridge-burning exercise, and although The New Statesman conceded that "the impact of the speech was to separate Kennedy, perhaps once and for all, from the Johnson administration", it also noted that Kennedy had been careful to deliver his speech when the Senate debate on the war had ended, so avoiding having his remarks associated with the other Senate doves.⁴⁴

Inevitably, Stone's Weekly tackled him over this tactic, and accused him of refusing to lead the opposition, while putting speeches on the record "to look good afterwards", as he had done in 1966.⁴⁵ One immediate effect of the speech seems to have been an order from Johnson to intensify the

bombing to show his determination to defy Kennedy.

Kennedy's dilemma was over: he had finally set himself apart from the President, even if he was not ready to join the dove team. The break, as he had expected, made him very unpopular in the country, and his Gallup national approval rating dropped 11 points that month (from 48 to 37). That figure would, of course, rise in the coming year, as he had also predicted.

In effect, Kennedy was now running for President, although he hadn't decided in which election. He probably saw 1972 as the only real possibility, but he needed to be ready in case Johnson looked like faltering before....

The rest of 1967 was taken up with swipes at the administration's inattention to problems elsewhere in the world, reinforcing Kennedy's image as a politician with a comprehensive foreign policy, in contrast to the President, who appeared increasingly preoccupied with a small country in Asia.

To emphasise his broad range of policy alternatives for the rest of the world, Kennedy brought out a book that year which was to act as a manifesto for his presidential campaign in 1968. To Seek a Newer World is essentially a rehash of his major Senate speeches, but more than three-quarters of it is taken up with foreign policy matters: where the Alliance for Progress was betrayed; how to negotiate over Vietnam; the prospects for an overture to China; nuclear disarmament, etc etc.

One curious act which is not mentioned in any of the Kennedy biographies is his decision to co-sponsor a bill in

May of 1967 with Senator Alan Bible of Nevada, aimed at increasing penalties on those who desecrated the US flag.

For all his declarations about free speech, and his defence of academics encouraging the Viet Cong to victory, this decision does seem out of character. Nevertheless, as the Congressional Record duly shows, on May 3, 1967, he co-sponsored a bill with Bible to "amend section 3 of title 4, US Code of Conduct, which prohibits the desecration or improper use of the flag of the US by any person within the District of Columbia, so as to make such prohibitions applicable throughout the US, to increase the penalties prescribed in such section with respect to desecration of the flag, and for other purposes".⁴⁶

Of much more importance, though, were his now rampant assaults on the administration. He attacked proposals to cut funding for the Alliance for Progress, and outlined some sensible proposals for the rejuvenation of Latin American economies.

Robert Kennedy's ideas for attracting private investment into the ghettos of America were, if not proven to be the answer to poverty, at least ahead of their time. It was many years before the private capital ideas he had propounded were tried out on a large scale, both in the US and Europe.

In his ideas for revitalising Latin American economies, too, his policies made sound business sense and many of his suggestions are now considered standard practice in areas relating to a Third World country's protection of its foreign exchange earnings, for example.

By mid-1967, now liberated from any compunction to

criticise his President, he described the intervention in the Dominican Republic as "a smarting wound". He hammered at the necessity for the US to join the side of revolution, and proclaimed that there could "be no preservation of the status quo in Latin America".⁴⁷ His ideas for the region did not involve any reduction of US interest in the affairs of Latin American countries, which would be maintained through a series of "partnerships", like that which existed between California and Chile. California sent technical experts and industrial advisors to Chile, in an attempt to improve living conditions in the South American country.

Kennedy proposed a major increase in development aid to the region in the following years, including a doubling of capital aid, which, he pointed out, would be the annual equivalent of the cost of the Vietnam war for two weeks.

His agricultural reforms proposed the creation of internal markets, and crop diversity. Many of the problems Kennedy raised seem obvious today, but at the time few were seriously addressing these questions. At a 1967 conference in Punta del Este in Uruguay, birthplace of the Alliance for Progress, the participating governments could not settle on a trading agreement between the US and its southern partners.

Kennedy suggested that the US was the problem. "We sought guarantees for US investments and lower tariffs on US sales to Latin America; they sought more favourable treatment for Latin American exports, both of commodities and manufactured goods, to the US, and had no further desire to protect our economic interests in their countries," he told the Senate.⁴⁸

US companies feared nationalisation by unstable governments, and so would not make long-term commitments to the country. Investments by major US companies were often short-term, and were often only made on the understanding that the company retained total control of these international operations (this short-term profit motive was also evident in many US companies' attitude to ghetto investment, when they feared similar problems of sabotage, a volatile workforce, and physical violence against their managers).

However, Kennedy argued (with some considerable insight, as would be revealed in the following decades in Latin America and Africa) that for American companies to gain real security in their investment, they had to be willing to surrender control of them to the local authorities.

What Kennedy advocated was US companies giving up 51% of their shares in a foreign venture to local shareholders. In this way, the success of the company's project would be in the interest of the local authority, and therefore more secure. In Mexico, this arrangement was already being tried with notable success. However, it took years before many US companies would willingly surrender majority shareholdings abroad.

Kennedy also continued his long-standing criticism of ("his") State Department, claiming that US withdrawal of aid from unco-operative countries was simply an admission of policy failure. Moreover, in these 1967 remarks on the Latin American situation, he recognised the existence of

nationalistic Communism, as opposed to one orchestrated by Peking/Moscow - hardly an earth-shattering discovery, but one which many of his Senate colleagues would never make.

Robert Kennedy experienced a "growth" in many areas of belief after his brother's death, we are assured by his closest colleagues. On civil rights and Vietnam he "matured", and moved to the left. However, his policies on Latin America, while less trumpeted, bore the marks of genuinely new thinking, and were among the most far-sighted he advocated during his Senate years. Latin America was not a burning issue during the 1968 election, of course, which was fought on the issues (as far as it was fought on any issues) of Vietnam and racial tension. The Hispanics who voted for Kennedy in such impressive numbers did so largely as a result of his interest in them as migrant workers and ghetto inhabitants, not because of the new business regulations he was proposing for Central and South America.

Similarly, his overwhelming support in the black community had less to do with what he had said in South Africa than what he said in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Even the Vietnam war, apparently, did not figure very highly as an issue in black areas, although most black leaders had come out against it, it diverted funds from the War on Poverty, and blacks suffered the highest proportion of casualties in combat.

Having staked out his independence from Johnson, without distancing himself from the party machine (many of whom, like Mayor Daley of Chicago, were quietly voicing concern about the conduct of the war in late 1967), Kennedy began to

seek advice on whether a coalition of blacks, anti-war activists and those otherwise disaffected by Johnson's leadership would be strong enough to pull off a presidential election victory. Almost all the answers he received agreed it was impossible, that a candidate heading such a movement would have no chance at unseating the incumbent President.

Securing the party's nomination would be difficult enough. At the 1968 convention, about 20% of delegates would come from southern states, where Kennedy was hardly a folk hero. Another 30% would be dominated by labour interests, where the Johnson-Humphrey team was especially strong, and where Kennedy was still resented for his hounding of former Teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa. The remaining half of the delegates would come from the rest of the country, some directly as a result of primaries, others from closed deals arranged by local party officials.

The south and the unions remained dominantly hawkish, and the rest of the country still favoured staying and winning in Vietnam, although support among this section of the public was dwindling.

A significant shift in attitude on the war began to take shape in the second half of 1967 which, within a year, left the electorate notably more dovish than it had ever been before. However, the swing in opinion came too late for the American democratic system, which produced two candidates (and Wallace) the following November who proposed fighting on, while about half the country wanted an immediate halt to hostilities.

This change in opinion also came too late for Kennedy to

jump into the presidential race in time to plan his campaign very effectively. Why much of the US public suddenly awoke to the implications of prolonging the war is not clear. Rules on draft deferments were tightened up in October 1967, making it much harder for students to evade the draft. This undoubtedly brought the war home to many families for the first time, and encouraged a fresh wave of protest from a previously unpoliticised middle-class. Unsurprisingly, too, campus opposition to the war grew stronger during that semester, and in November of that year 50,000 people staged a march on the Pentagon to protest against the war.

Mounting casualty figures no doubt played a major part in moulding public awareness. 112 Americans were killed in action in 1964, 1130 in 1965, 4179 in 1966, and 7482 in 1967. At the end of 1964, there were 23,00 American troops involved in the conflict. By the end of 1967, the number had risen to 525,000.⁴⁹

Other reasons have also been suggested for the shift in US opinion at this time. Respected television journalist Walter Cronkite visited the war zone at the beginning of 1968, and on his return broke with the established network tradition of newscaster neutrality by criticising the conflict directly on his show. Much of the rest of the media took up the anti-war cause about this time.

It has been suggested, too, that the Vietnam war was the first to be fought on television, and that when Americans witnessed the general horror of war beamed into their homes on a nightly basis, they lost the stomach to continue the fight. Television ownership certainly increased dramatically

during these years: in 1960, 45 million American homes boasted a television set, but by 1968 that number had reached 75 million (a quarter of them colour).⁵⁰

Whatever the direct effects of watching war on the television, a definite mood swing against the administration's policies began in late '67. (Whether television reporting had much to do with this is debatable, but the US authorities were careful in later conflicts to deny reporters the sort of access to combat zones they had enjoyed in Vietnam.) In November of that year, too, Nixon pulled ahead of Johnson in opinion polls for the first time. The administration was clearly in trouble, and the more unpopular it, and its war, became, the more pundits looked towards Kennedy for any sign of movement. Typically, he hesitated.

In June he had introduced Johnson at a New York political dinner with the definition of greatness as defined in Webster's dictionary. In an inordinately fawning introduction of the President, punctuated by the noise of 1400 anti-war protestors outside the hall, Kennedy noted how Johnson "has poured out all his own strength to renew the great strength of the country...he has sought consensus, but has never shrunk from controversy...he has gained huge popularity but never hesitated to spend it on what he thought important. In 1964 he won the greatest popular victory in modern times, and with our help he will do so again in 1968," he gushed.⁵¹

It is hard to see what Kennedy was angling for in acting in such a way - it could have been that he wanted to prove

before party hacks that there was no unbridgeable gulf between himself and the White House, or that, no matter what, he would not threaten party unity, or it simply could have been that one of his speechwriters (in this case, Ted Sorenson) went a little over the top in preparing a few routine remarks.

Whatever the reason, such gestures, coupled with Kennedy's unwillingness to go for the jugular during these months, forced anti-war activists to search around for a more reliable champion. It was proposed that economist J.K. Galbraith, an Ambassador to India in the Kennedy administration, should stand for president in the upcoming '68 elections on an anti-war platform.

Galbraith was keen, but a birth certificate showing him to have been born in Canada ruled his candidacy out on Constitutional grounds. Another attempt, this time to get dovish Senator Fulbright to run, failed, as did attempts to get Martin Luther King, Dr Benjamin Spock, and retired Army General James Gavin to seek the presidency.

Kennedy refused to enter the race, although he was contemplating it. At a series of confidential meetings held in October and November '67, top advisors met to discuss the possibility of his toppling Johnson. Most, including Ted Kennedy, opposed the idea, although a Lou Harris opinion poll in October showed him beating Johnson 52-32.

In many ways, however, these strategy meetings were futile. Much of the electorate believed that he was in the race, if undeclared, and the media quickly magnified any criticism he made of Johnson into a signal that he was about

to declare his candidacy.

In such a situation, Kennedy was almost forced to run by public opinion. If he defied common belief and held out until 1972, he risked being blamed for extending the war when he could have won the presidency and stopped it. If that scenario were played out, much of his national constituency might turn against him in the following four years.

He cancelled a proposed trip to Eastern Europe in late '67 (which would have done his standing with Polish-Americans no harm at all) to monitor the situation. No doubt the Polish government, and the US embassy in Warsaw, were relieved. During his trip to the country in 1964, Kennedy had annoyed the authorities so much with his emotional appeals to crowds that "he got the embassy so mad it could hardly sputter," recalled the ambassador.⁵²

At the end of November, 1967, Bob McNamara "resigned" as Secretary of Defense. His removal scotched all realistic hopes that a negotiated settlement on the war was near, and further convinced Kennedy that Johnson was unlikely to pull out of Vietnam.

Ted Kennedy, meanwhile, went to the war zone to witness the refugee situation. On his return, he confirmed the reports that Robert Kennedy had been receiving for some months: that the administration was playing down the civilian casualties and its efficiency in subduing the enemy.

The former Attorney General began to get moral about the issue. On the television show Face the Nation at the end of

November, he went beyond the usual criticism of the way the war was being run, and the high casualties, and questioned the right of the US to be there in the first place.

"We're going in there and we're killing South Vietnamese, we're killing children, we're killing women, we're killing innocent people...because [the Communists are] 12,000 miles away and they might get to be 11,000 miles away."

"Do we have the right here in the United States to say that we're going to kill tens of thousands, make millions of people, as we have...refugees, kill women and children? I very seriously whether we have that right....Those of us who stay here in the United States, we must feel it when we use napalm, when a village is destroyed and civilians are killed. This is also our responsibility...".⁵³

Far more eloquent now that he had been earlier in the year in a televised debate on Vietnam with California Governor Ronald Reagan, who had forced him onto the defensive and easily won the contest, Kennedy almost appeared ready to join the campaign fray.

Calmer counsel prevailed, however, and he refused a final plea from New York anti-war activist Al Lowenstein to declare his candidacy. Lowenstein went instead to South Dakota Senator George McGovern, who refused on the grounds that he was up for re-election, and then to Senator Eugene McCarthy from Minnesota who, to general surprise, accepted.

McCarthy formally declared his candidacy on November 30, and ensured that some of the Democratic primaries, at least, would be dominated by the Vietnam issue.

Kennedy's long silence in the second half of 1966 had

forced many to conclude that he was a cynical opportunist, and his delay in entering the presidential race only confirmed this view. A full three and a half months after McCarthy had declared (and thereby "split the party" - a reason Kennedy always put forward himself for not running), he eventually threw his hat into the ring.

What probably tipped the scales, apart from various family members urging him on, and an increasingly embarrassing position which, he believed, meant that McCarthy was taking over much of the constituency which was rightfully his, was the Tet offensive. At the end of January 1968, the North Vietnamese army and the Viet Cong guerrillas based in the south launched a large-scale operation against US troops throughout South Vietnam. Although a failure in strictly military terms, which resulted in extraordinarily high casualty figures for the guerrillas, it was a devastatingly successful psychological coup.

It exploded the myth that the US was about to win the war, as the Viet Cong struck at the most protected American enclaves - including the US embassy in Saigon, which it captured for several hours - proving that the US army was failing dismally to subjugate the Communists.

The Tet offensive (so named because it took place during the Vietnamese religious holiday of Tet) also increased US public resistance to the war, although a Gallup poll taken just before the offensive showed 70% of the public in favour the bombing. "Half a million American soldiers, with 700,000 Vietnamese allies, with total command of the air,

total command of the sea, backed by huge resources and the most modern weapons, are unable to secure even a single city from the attacks of an enemy whose total strength is about 250,000,"⁵⁴ Kennedy told an audience in Chicago on February 7.

If he was not to lose his status as the most important anti-war figure in the country, Kennedy would have to act, and he did. During his trip to Chicago, Mayor Daley mentioned to him the possibility of setting up a Presidential commission to review the war. Just before Kennedy declared his candidacy, after McCarthy's narrow loss to Johnson in the New Hampshire primary had proved that the President was more vulnerable than almost all the experts had predicted, he made a last-ditch attempt at the commission idea.

Kennedy met with the new Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford in mid-March to discuss the proposal. Conflicting reports of the meeting make it impossible to know for sure what was said, but it appears as though Kennedy offered not to enter the presidential race if a serious effort was made to set up a commission to review the war.

The commission idea could never have worked, of course, as no president would accept the usurpation of his power in such a way. However, Kennedy probably went through the motions of proposing it anyway to make clear to party bosses that he had gone the extra mile, and really had been left with no alternative other than to go for the nomination.

Moreover, the most serious proponent of the commission idea had been Mayor Daley, with whom Kennedy could not

afford to fall out if he was to have a serious chance of the nomination ("Daley's the ball game", he noted to an aide during the campaign).⁵⁵

Inevitably, the commission idea was rejected by Johnson. The President's decision to ignore the findings of another commission, into the race riots of the previous summer, also spurred Kennedy towards announcing his candidacy.

The Kerner Commission Report, published on 29 February, cited white racism a major cause of the disturbances and, together with the failure of US foreign policy, provided Kennedy with reason enough to join the race.

When he declared, however, most of the country was still probably hawkish, although the impetus was definitely moving towards the doves. Media comment against the war was just beginning to take off, and major atrocities against Vietnamese civilians were still secret at this time.

In fact, at exactly the time Kennedy was declaring his candidacy in Washington on March 16, 1968, the infamous My Lai massacre was taking place in Vietnam, when US troops from Charlie Company murdered hundreds of innocent civilians.

That Saturday morning, as GIs raped, murdered and mutilated their way through 400 defenceless Vietnamese civilians, Kennedy was announcing his candidacy to end the war. "I run because I am convinced that this country is on a perilous course....For the reality of recent events in Vietnam has been glossed over with illusions," he announced.⁵⁶

Earlier that week, he had hit on the morality theme again

on his strongest speech yet on Vietnam. "Are we like the God of the Old Testament that we can decide here in Washington, D.C., what cities, what towns, what hamlets in Vietnam are going to be destroyed?" he had demanded in the Senate.⁵⁷ His public comments on the war in the next few weeks were often even more emotional. Kennedy's best chance of capturing the nomination, thought his campaign team, was to concentrate on his public appeal. In this way, the thinking went, he would not only generate valuable votes in the primaries he entered, but also persuade party bosses (who held the key to many more convention delegates) that he was the likeliest candidate to win in November.

"We're going to do it a new way - in the streets," predicted Senate aide Adam Walinsky.⁵⁸ Student audiences would convey this idea best, as they were often wildly enthusiastic about Kennedy, and identified with his "pop star" image. Consequently, many of Kennedy's speeches were made at college campuses so television viewers could now witness how popular the candidate was (black audiences were often just as emotionally charged as students, but such images sent the wrong sort of signals to television watchers, so Kennedy tried to avoid addressing them in such a way).

To hype up a student crowd, of course, Kennedy concentrated his attacks on the Vietnam war, which by now was very unpopular on campuses. "Can we ordain to ourselves the awful majesty of God - to decide what cities and villages are to be destroyed, who will live and who will die, and who will join the refugees wandering in a desert of

our own creation?" he asked at Kansas State University.⁵⁹

Most of his major addresses in the first days after he announced his candidacy were to these sorts of audiences who, according to various reports, were "wild, "uncontrollable", or simply "frenzied".

In California, he spoke to what reporter Jules Witcover described as "a mob scene that in size, frenzy and physical threat of stampede rivalled anything that DeMille ever had committed to film".⁶⁰

Kennedy hammered on at his emotional Vietnam theme. "Our brave young men dying in the swamps of Southeast Asia. Which of them might have written a poem? Which of them might have cured cancer? Which of them might have played in a World Series or given us the gift of laughter from the stage or helped build a bridge or a university? Which of them would have taught a child to read?"⁶¹

In Los Angeles ("before one more screaming crowd," as Arthur Schlesinger remembered it⁶²), he accused Johnson of calling on "the darker impulses of the American spirit".⁶³ Even sympathetic journalists were uncomfortable with the emotive attacks, and some press reports described the senator as a demagogue.

Kennedy was making an overt attempt to cash in on the emotion surrounding his name, but defended his actions by suggesting that the system left him with no alternative. "I have to win through the people. Otherwise I'm not going to win," he explained to the New York Post.⁶⁴

The first primary contest was in Indiana, however, which was among the most conservative above the Mason-Dixon line.

Wallace had done very well there in 1964, winning 30% of the vote in the Democratic primary, and Kennedy had to modify his approach for the primary, scheduled for May 7.

After Johnson's sensational withdrawal from the race on March 31, Kennedy was left to slug it out with McCarthy in the rest of the primaries without substantial differing over the main issue of Vietnam.

In Indiana, at least, a "favourite son" candidate was standing. Governor Roger Branigan represented the powerful local machine, and by beating him Kennedy could show the Daleys that his organisation was just as powerful as theirs. With Johnson out, Branigan's candidacy was interpreted as an effort for Vice-President Humphrey, who had announced his candidacy in the days after Johnson's withdrawal.

However, with the main primary contests now between McCarthy and Kennedy, the war receded as an issue, and became secondary to that of race. The "ghetto problem" was brought into focus even more sharply four days after Johnson's announcement that he was no longer a candidate, when Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis. The killing sparked off a wave of violent reaction in nearly every major US city, and put the whole question of racial violence top of the political agenda.

Kennedy's win (by 42% to Branigan's 31% and McCarthy's 27%) was fairly impressive, given his lack of local party support. The New Republic noted that "of the top 100 Democrats in the state who backed John F. Kennedy in the 1960 primary, only one...went with Robert Kennedy this year. Of some 200 top elected officials, such as mayors and

legislators, only three had announced for Kennedy 10 days before the primary".⁶⁵

Foreign policy featured well down the list of most voters' concerns in Indiana. Kennedy concentrated on the "law and order" issue, and where he did mention international affairs, it was, as one reporter noted, to "remind his listeners that he knew how to take a 'firm line' against the Communists, having learned this during the Cuban Missile Crisis".⁶⁶

That this line had not been quite as firm as Kennedy was claiming was, of course, not discovered until after his death, but it probably did not make a crucial difference anyway, as most voters tended to regard Kennedy as radical or not largely on the basis of what he looked like.

So despite all his soul-searching on the Vietnam war, despite the months of inner turmoil on when, and how, to best criticise the administration's policies on Vietnam, when it finally came down to what mattered, votes in primaries, the issue was not the most important one.

Democrats in Nebraska, Oregon, South Dakota and California were given the opportunity to choose between Kennedy and McCarthy, who offered almost identical proposals to end the war. Kennedy won all the contests except Oregon where, interestingly, the racial problem was not significant, and the campaign focused slightly more on Vietnam.

In California, the contest between Kennedy and McCarthy predictably concentrated on domestic issues, although the war and one or two other, more minor foreign policy issues,

did surface sporadically during the campaign.

Foreign affairs were cited repeatedly by Kennedy during the campaign to emphasise his suitability for office. It was remarkable that after four years as Attorney General, and three and a half years as a New York senator, Kennedy's major qualifications for the presidency lay in his experience of international events.

During a rather stilted debate on television with McCarthy on June 1, for example, Kennedy took several opportunities to remind viewers of his broad responsibilities in foreign policy during the Kennedy administration. "While I was a member of the National Security Council for three and a half years, I was involved in some of those matters during that period of time in connection with Latin America and in connection with Africa, with the test ban treaty, and I suppose the most critical crisis that has ever been faced by mankind, the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962," he recalled for the benefit of voters with amnesia.⁶⁷

A few days before, he had stressed the importance of the war as an issue in the campaign, and warned that if neither himself nor McCarthy arrived at the convention with a high enough number of delegates, Humphrey would be nominated, and "there will be no candidate [in November] who has opposed the course of the war in Vietnam...".⁶⁸

During the televised debate a questioner referred to a proposal made by Kennedy that week that the US send 50 Phantom jets to Israel, and asked McCarthy if he agreed. McCarthy said he did, and the issue was passed over quickly

as a minor one on which the candidates did not disagree.

Four days later, Kennedy gave his victory speech in the California primary, which he had won by a narrow margin of 46.3% to 41.8%. He did not realise - ever - that the gap had been so tight, as the full returns did not come in for some time, and showed McCarthy to have done much better than had been predicted earlier.

Kennedy gave the routine victory speech, and rounded up his remarks with a reminder that "American troops and American Marines [are] carrying the major burden of [the Vietnamese] conflict".⁶⁹

Then he left the platform where he had been speaking, and was assassinated by a Palestinian supposedly motivated by Kennedy's support for Israel. Kennedy - however disturbed the reasoning of his assassin - was apparently killed over an issue of foreign policy.

Although he never held any ambassadorship, had never worked in the State Department, and had never been based in any country other than his own, Kennedy had staked his bid for the presidency primarily on his experience in international affairs, and his alternative suggestions for America's role in the world.

He had come along way in a decade (in 1956 he had voted for Eisenhower), and his political contribution is generally remembered for his advice during the Cuban Missile Crisis and his opposition to the Vietnam war.

In 1985, Eugene McCarthy noted that the deal which finally ended the Vietnam war was based on proposals put forward during the Democratic Convention of 1968. "Kissinger

negotiated the deal and said he based it on the Democratic plank of 1968. That plank was a Kennedy plank - it was the one suggested by Bobby Kennedy's people and adopted at the convention."⁷⁰

These last two chapters have attempted to assess Robert Kennedy's wider contribution to American foreign policy. His foreign policy legacy lies in the reputation he forged during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when with his brother he struck a secret deal with the Soviets which averted an escalation of hostilities.

In international affairs, he appears to have operated with a generally free hand during his White House days, moving the US fleet close to the Dominican Republic during a critical juncture there, and bartering with Cuban leader Fidel Castro over prisoners taken at the Bay of Pigs.

He claimed to have entered the Senate to influence foreign policy, and based his opposition of the Johnson administration largely on the Vietnam War, speaking out against it as early as February 1966.

He was not the most powerful or consistent opponent of the war, however, and other senators led Congressional opposition to its conduct. On other issues, Kennedy demonstrated remarkable judgement, for example in the policies he advocated for US relations with Latin America and Africa.

NOTES

1. In His Own Words. p390
2. Congressional Record. May 6 1965 p9037. Speech in Senate chamber.
3. Stone's Weekly May 17 1965
4. Schlesinger p695
5. Ibid No. 3, Dec. 13 1965
6. Ibid, March 7 1966
7. Ibid No. 2 May 9 1966 p10090. Speech to Senate chamber.
8. Ibid
9. Ibid No. 2, May 10 1966. Speech to Senate chamber.
10. Gwirtzman & Vanden Heuvel p219
11. Ibid No. 2 March 14 1966 p5619. Speech to Senate chamber.
12. Ibid
13. Ibid No. 3
14. Ibid No. 2 March 14 1966 p5620. Speech to Senate chamber.
15. Ibid
16. Ibid
17. Ibid
18. News Statesman February 25 1966
19. The Spectator March 11 1966
20. Ibid no. 14
21. Ibid. Speech to Senate chamber.
22. Ibid
23. Ibid

24. No. 18 July 18 1966
25. No. 19 July 8 1966
26. Ibid Sept 9 1966
27. No. 3 Oct 24 1966
28. Ibid
29. Alonzo L Hamby p220
30. No. 2 March 10 1968
31. Harper's October 1966
32. Halberstam p121
33. No.2 p302
34. Ibid
35. Ibid p324
36. Although the Azapo extremists were partly the reason Ted Kennedy decided to cut short his 1984 South Africa trip, he still maintained good relations with the mainstream liberation movements like the ANC and UDF. In 1985 he co-sponsored the successful Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Bill, the strongest sanctions legislation passed by the US.
37. No. 3 December 17 1966
38. No. 10 p238
39. Ibid
40. No. 3 February 20 1967
41. No. 10 p254
42. No. 19 March 10 1967
43. Ibid February 17 1967
44. No. 18 March 10 1967
45. No. 3 March 13 1967
46. No. 2 May 3 1967
47. To Seek a Newer World p136

48. Ibid no. 2 May 10 1966 p10090. Speech to Senate chamber.
49. No. 4 p822
50. No. 10 p257
51. No. 4 p655
52. Ibid p737
53. Ibid p842
54. No. 10 p202
55. Witcover p52
56. No. 2 March 10 1968
57. No. 55 p106. Speech to Senate chamber.
58. Ibid p204
59. Ibid
60. Newfield p138. Speech to Senate chamber.
61. No. 4 p841
62. Ibid
63. Ibid no. 55 p56
64. The New York Post May 11 1968
65. Ibid
66. No. 55 p162
67. Ibid p168
68. Ibid
69. Ibid p280
70. Sirhan Sirhan, a Palestinian from Jerusalem, was convicted of RFK's murder and sentenced to death, later commuted to life imprisonment. He claimed he had killed Kennedy because of the senator's pro-Israeli policies. Philip Melanson and other assassination experts are dubious that this was the real motive - see Melanson and Blair. Despite several parole hearings, (the last of which was

rejected in August 1992), Sirhan remains in prison in California. He continues to claim that he was in a trance when the shooting took place, and cannot remember actually killing Kennedy.

After the assassination, police believed that Arabs in the US might be targets for revenge attacks. When a 19-year-old black was arrested for the murder of a Jordanian grocer in Chicago, local police suggested that his motive could have been tied to the RFK assassination, and that he was killed because "the suspect in Los Angeles is also a Jordanian".

71. Eugene McCarthy: personal interview May 1985

VI - THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

"On to Chicago and let's win there..." - RFK, June 5 1968.

EXACTLY when Kennedy decided to run for president in unclear. He had hovered near the brink of declaring himself a candidate for much of 1967. By January 1968 he was ready to go, and then suddenly pulled back from an announcement, momentarily frightened that it would be a reckless and harmful decision.

In many ways, of course, he had been running as an undeclared candidate ever since he entered the Senate in January 1965 (some Democrats believed he should have been a presidential candidate even before that, and during the 1964 primaries he won write-in votes in six states, including more than 19% of the Massachusetts primary vote).

However, he never seriously considered challenging Johnson for the presidency that year, although of course he

was initially disappointed not to be offered the vice-presidency. By the 1966 mid-term elections, however, rumours that Kennedy might stand in '68 were beginning to gain momentum. His diligent campaigning for Democrats during the '66 elections led many to believe he was granting favours he would soon ask to be returned in the form of help with his own campaign.

He was particularly popular with candidates whose campaigns had financial problems. As the Wall St Journal of October 17 1966 explained: "When a Kennedy comes for a fund-raising affair, not only do tickets sell fast but the local party keeps practically all the proceeds. When Mr Johnson or Mr Humphrey comes for a fund-raiser, anywhere from 50% to 100% of the proceeds usually must go to the Democratic National Committee in Washington."¹

Kennedy made a series of appearances for both those with safe seats and no-hopers that autumn, and took the opportunity to impress party bosses with the enthusiasm he could generate among voters. With an eye on courting the sort of constituency he would focus on during his own campaign, he made a series of appearances in Polish-American districts of Chicago, and joined a motorcade through the city with the all-important Mayor Daley, whose support would be crucial to any Kennedy bid for the presidency.

Speculation during 1966 that he might make an assault on the White House two years later was fired by a series of opinion polls showing Kennedy a popular alternative to Johnson. A Gallup poll in March that year suggested Kennedy would be preferred to Nixon by 54% to 41% of all voters, and

a Harris poll in September had him leading President Johnson by 47% to 41% among Democrats, and by 39% to 37% among all voters.²

Such statistics were bound to provide fuel for media commentary on Kennedy's chances for 1968, and several pieces appeared towards the end of '66 exploring the prospects of his taking on Johnson during the '68 primaries. Most agreed that it would be unlikely that Kennedy would announce in 1968, but would rather wait until 1972, when Johnson would not be standing for re-election, and the other likely candidate, Hubert Humphrey, would be regarded as out of touch by many of the younger generation.

Helen Hill Miller in The New Republic of October 15 noted it was "foolish to talk about Robert Kennedy in '68", but outlined how he might be forced into the race if the war in Vietnam continued and the president's popularity remained in decline.³ The Nation of November 14 suggested that a Kennedy bid in '68 was "improbable, but hardly impossible", and predicted that the senator would wait until 1972.⁴

Kennedy's problem was that neither '68 nor '72 were the optimum years for him to run for president. In 1968 he would have been a senator for less than four years, and would not have developed his alternative coalition enough to be sure of a strong campaign. Moreover, it would mean taking on the incumbent president who personally hated him, and risk splitting the Democratic Party. Johnson could also stop the war practically overnight, and so deprive Kennedy of his most important issue.

By waiting until 1972, however, there was a danger that

someone else might begin to attract Kennedy's new-found national constituency. A less cautious Democrat might even run against Johnson in '68 and win. The 1970 gubernatorial elections could throw up a young, liberal candidate who might usurp Kennedy's place as the new radical hope. Kennedy had already voiced worries about New York Republican Mayor Lindsay and anyway, 1972 was a long way off, and Kennedy's popularity might wane in the intervening years.

In many ways Kennedy was like an Olympic athlete who peaks off-year. The ideal time for him to run for president would have been around 1970 when, of course, there was no election, so he was left with the choice of running too early, or leaving it too late.

The dilemma dogged him throughout 1966 and 1967, and advisors offered conflicting opinions right up until he announced in mid-March '68. One of the first to suggest he run was Senate aide Adam Walinsky, who outlined the case in a memo to the senator the day after the November '66 elections. "Johnson is a lame duck," proposed Walinsky, and over the next year the rest of Kennedy's Senate staff joined in the effort to persuade him to run in '68.⁵

During 1967, however, nearly everyone else in the Kennedy entourage, including most of JFK's former advisors, (and principally his brother, Ted) urged caution, believing that Johnson was unbeatable and that Kennedy could spoil his chances for '72 if he pushed too quickly. In March '67, Hugh Sidey noted in Life magazine that "the last thing Kennedy wants to do is run in '68".⁶ In fact, Kennedy probably quite fancied the idea of campaigning in '68, but it was not a

question of personal like or dislike. Kennedy, characteristically, would only run if he thought he could win, and kept himself out of the race until he was convinced he could get the nomination.

Nevertheless, as the 1968 primaries approached, the growing anti-war movement began to search round for a presidential candidate, and naturally made advances to Kennedy. Allard Lowenstein represented various political organisations on the left (he was a former president of the National Student Association and in 1967 a vice-chairman of the liberal ADA), and headed the search for an anti-Johnson Democrat to stand for president.

By the second half of 1967 Lowenstein was hopeful that Kennedy might be persuaded to enter the race, even though the senator had taken strenuous efforts not to upset the administration too much. In June, at a dinner in New York, Kennedy had described Johnson as "one who had borne the burdens of the world as few other men have ever borne them".⁷

Two months later, on a plane to California, Lowenstein asked Kennedy for the first time if he would be the anti-war candidate. Kennedy declined, and Lowenstein began to search for other contenders. A list of possibles was suggested, including Martin Luther King, child psychologist Dr Benjamin Spock and the economist and former ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith (who was genuinely interested in the possibility but could not overcome the constitutional handicap of having been born in Canada).

Lowenstein turned to Congressman Don Edwards of

California⁸, and Senator Frank Church of Idaho, both opponents of the war. Both said no. He approached retired General James M. Gavin, who had denounced American involvement in Vietnam. Gavin would have made an attractive candidate, but unfortunately was a Republican. As 1967 wore on, the pressure for Lowenstein to come up with a credible anti-war candidate increased.

In October, an estimated 50,000 anti-war protestors demonstrated outside the Pentagon, and the peace movement was gaining such momentum that early the same month a group of Kennedy's advisors met to explore the possibility of him joining the race in '68 after all. Most were still against it (although, incredibly, the prospect that Johnson might offer Kennedy the vice-presidency the following year was still discussed as a serious possibility).

At the end of October, more and more politicians were urging Kennedy to run. In a response to a question at Berkeley, Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota declared that "times arise in politics when an individual like Bobby Kennedy has no right to calculate that things will be better for him personally if he waits until 1972".⁹

Early indications also showed that the anti-war movement might enjoy more political muscle than had previously been expected. In November, the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP) managed to register 71,000 people and have its name included on the California primary ballots.

Kennedy would not be swayed, however, and Lowenstein returned to the Senate offices, to ask George McGovern of South Dakota if he would run. McGovern considered the offer

for a few weeks, but declined. He was up for re-election in 1968, had only won in 1962 by 597 votes, and believed the risk of losing his Senate seat was too great to embark on a presidential campaign. He did suggest, however, that Lowenstein should ask Eugene McCarthy, who was not up for re-election.

McCarthy was a successful senator - he had been mooted as possible running-mate for Johnson had LBJ won the nomination in 1960, and was very nearly offered the position in 1964. That year he was re-elected to the Senate by the biggest majority ever achieved by a Democrat in Minnesota, and was an influential senator, enjoying membership of the two most important committees, Finance and Foreign Relations.

When McCarthy accepted Lowenstein's invitation at the end of 1967 to be a focus for the anti-war movement, Kennedy was immediately cornered. A McCarthy effort, if only partially successful, threatened to attract the constituency of dissent Kennedy had so assiduously cultivated in the previous years. If McCarthy's candidacy bombed, on the other hand, it would strengthen Johnson's grip on the party and would suggest that the anti-war liberals were incapable of electoral success.

McCarthy announced his presidential bid at the end of October. The first primary was scheduled for March 12, in New Hampshire. Meanwhile, Kennedy dithered. The organisation he was trying to build was not ready to propel him to the White House, he believed. At the end of 1967, although very popular throughout the country, he could count on the

support of very few labour leaders, and very few party bosses. Both would be needed to win the nomination in 1968.

The party had not fully emerged from the days when a few key Democrats in a few key states could all but decide on the nominee. In Illinois, of course, Daley still ruled from Chicago. In California, too, there were the remnants of the old machine (although Jesse Unruh from that state was, at least, on Kennedy's side). In Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas - the other states which sent more than 100 delegates to the 1968 convention - Kennedy would have to rely on local heavyweights to provide delegate votes.

By January, Kennedy was torn between jumping into the race, thereby unleashing a wave of resentment against his splitting the party, and standing aside to see McCarthy steal his place at the spearhead of dissent. That month, Ted Kennedy returned from Vietnam and reported on the refugee problem first-hand. However, along with most advisors, Ted still counselled that Robert Kennedy should not enter the campaign, and should bide his time until 1972.

Nevertheless, Ted's report about the state of things in Vietnam seriously tempted Kennedy to announce in late January. His supporters - some of them politically very valuable - were beginning to leave him to join the McCarthy campaign. Despite working for McCarthy, Lowenstein was still urging Kennedy to run. In a stormy meeting between the two in January, Kennedy cited the usual reasons he was going to stay out (too difficult to win, spoil his chances for '72, disrupt party unity, etc). "The people who think that the honour and future of this country are at stake don't give a

shit what Mayor Daley and Chairman X and Governor Y think. We're going ahead and we're going to win, and it's a shame you're not with us because you could have been president," countered Lowenstein.¹⁰ Kennedy was impressed by such arguments, and almost decided to join the race.

Then, just as he was on the brink of declaring, the North Koreans seized the American ship Pueblo. Immediately, President Johnson called up 14,000 reserves and, briefly, the public were with him. The incident reminded Kennedy how such small events, completely outside his control, could determine the popularity of the President and, therefore, the success of his own campaign. A week later, however, something else changed his mind again. On January 31 the Viet Cong launched the Tet Offensive. Attacking cities throughout South Vietnam, the guerrillas even raided the American Embassy in Saigon and held the compound for several hours. It was a devastating psychological blow for the Americans who were convinced that they were winning the war, and as news of the offensive reached the United States, public opinion began to swing away from the administration and towards the peace protestors.

On February 8, while reports from Vietnam were beginning to recognise the significance of the of the Viet Cong attacks, Kennedy breakfasted with Richard Daley in Chicago. Kennedy hovered once again on the brink of announcing, but Daley persuaded him to stall while the idea of a special commission on the war was explored.

Kennedy held off, but pressure was growing for him to announce. The Tet offensive had generated substantial unease

among the public, and McCarthy appeared likely to capitalise on the mounting disquiet. Apart from the war, Kennedy was also outraged at the White House reaction to the Kerner Commission's reports into inner-city riots, published at the end of February. The commission criticised some of the Great Society programmes, and made important recommendations to the president to avert more violence. However, the report was received by administration officials with stony silence. "He's not gong to do anything about the war, and now he's not going to do anything about the cities either!" complained Kennedy.

Meanwhile, McCarthy was making the most of public dissatisfaction. He began campaigning in New Hampshire at the end of January from exactly the same spot where John Kennedy had begun his campaign for the presidency eight years earlier. Speaking next to a bust of the late president on January 25, McCarthy began the first of just 15 days he would spend campaigning in the state.

The New Hampshire results shocked the most experienced political analysts. McCarthy did not actually beat the president but, like the Tet attacks, caused enough damage to inflict a massive psychological blow on the administration. Johnson took 49.6% of the vote, but McCarthy had won an astounding 41.9%.¹¹

Kennedy's mind was all but made up. He was waiting only for the proposal on the war commission to be formally rejected, and then he could go. He felt it important that he should be seen to have walked the extra mile for peace, and for party unity. The goodwill of Mayor Daley was also so

crucial to Kennedy's plans that he had to stick with Daley's compromise proposal of a special commission until the White House rejected it.

At about 5pm on Thursday March 14 (the day after the New Hampshire results were declared), Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford called the senator's office and relayed the president's formal rejection of the idea. Kennedy was now free to run without being charged with failing to explore all other options to end the war.

It was the last in a series of hurdles in his own mind he had to overcome to announce his candidacy. "That night I decided to run for president," he recalled, although in reality it had been a protracted process of weighing up advantages and disadvantages over months, and probably years.¹²

Some close advisors, including President Kennedy's former Press Secretary, Pierre Salinger, were not aware just how close Kennedy was to running, and only at this point knew of his immediate plans to announce. So "last-minute" had the final decision been, in fact, that The Listener magazine dated March 14 was being sold containing an interview with Kennedy on why he would definitely not be a candidate.

To qualify for the California primary, he had to formally open his campaign by Monday, March 18. For media purposes, however, Saturday was obviously the best choice, as it would be the biggest news for the widely-read Sunday papers, and would guarantee him an interview on one of the popular weekend political programmes. Moreover, Sunday was St Patrick's Day, and the newly-announced candidate could

expect large-scale media coverage if he joined the march in New York.

So at 10am on Saturday March 16, Kennedy walked into the same Senate caucus room where he had interrogated Jimmy Hoffa in the 1950s, and where his brother had announced his presidential candidacy on January 2, 1960. With the same opening line used by John Kennedy that day, the senator declared: "I am announcing today my candidacy for the Presidency of the United States," and in a blatant and hopeless attempt to deflect attention away from his personal feud with the president, continued: "I do not run for the Presidency merely to oppose any man but to propose new policies."¹³ He then went on to outline why he felt it necessary to run - because of the war, and the rioting in the cities, and praised McCarthy's "remarkable" campaign.

Kennedy's first major decision as candidate would be which primaries to enter. He confirmed at the time of his announcement that he would be standing in California (June 4), and that state law required he also be on the ballot in Nebraska (May 14) and Oregon (May 28).

However, to win the nomination Kennedy would have to convince the party bosses that he was the most electable candidate to put up against the Republicans in November. To do this, he would have to enter and win most, if not all, the available primaries. More importantly, he would have to demonstrate that he could win votes from crucial areas which might otherwise go Republican, and that he would elicit massive support from traditional Democratic voters. Although Kennedy's popularity among black voters was expected, he

would have to show that he could gain those votes without alienating whites, especially blue-collar whites, who might otherwise be attracted to a candidate like Nixon.

Moreover, many Democrats who would vote in the primaries depended on local Democratic control of their state for their jobs. The patronage system was still in place in many areas of the US in 1968, and party regulars would be hoping to nominate a presidential candidate who would improve their chances of success in local elections come November.

Were Kennedy to come across as too liberal, for example, or too soft on crime, he might ruin the hopes of a number of local Democratic politicians running for office from national congress to local city hall.

In Kennedy's case, the doubts arose about his ability to attract votes from the white working-class. His position on the war was not especially helpful to securing support from this traditionally patriotic group, and nor was his identification with black aspirations. Although running at a time of relative economic prosperity, racial tensions in northern cities were becoming to dominate the domestic political agenda, as low-income whites voiced their fears about increased violence and "preferential treatment" for blacks, whose neighbourhoods appeared to be enjoying federal investment as a reward for rioting.

It was crucial that Kennedy should make an impressive showing among blue-collar whites if Mayor Daley and his acolytes were to be convinced. An excellent test of Kennedy's pulling-power with this group would be in Indiana, the first primary he would enter, to be held on May 7.

Indiana was known as a hard-line state on racial matters. Despite its northern geography, it had traditionally afforded the Ku Klux Klan a remarkable level of support. In the mid-1920, it was calculated that most members of its state legislature were supported by the Klan. In more recent times, Alabama Governor George Wallace had become a hero among its low-income white population, winning 30% of the vote in the 1964 presidential primary. Wallace would run well here in the general election of '68, taking 11.5% of the vote, and also in the 1972 primaries, when he lost to Humphrey by 47% to 41%. The state also had a long military tradition, was home of the headquarters of the American Legion, and, in the spring of 1968, had no real anti-Vietnam war movement.

It did, however, have some compensations for Kennedy. A write-in campaign organised against his wishes by hard-core supporters had won him 5% of the 1964 primary, and if he could win here, in a state with such a tough reputation, it would go a long way to persuade the hard-bitten party bosses that he was serious candidate. Also, there were several large pockets of black voters. In 1967, Richard Hatcher became only the second black person ever elected mayor of a major US city when he narrowly beat machine candidate John Krupa by 1300 votes to win in Gary, Indiana. Kennedy had asked aide Dick Tuck to go to Gary and help Hatcher during the election, and so in 1968 not only had a political IOU from the mayor but also an aide with expertise of the city's electorate.

Kennedy's initial task was to win the Indiana primary

convincingly, and win it with a significant number of blue-collar votes from white districts. Much of his campaign concentrated on this effort, and his staff were quick to highlight any evidence that he was popular in these areas.

For years, much of the Robert Kennedy legend has relied on the voting figures from Indiana, and they have been used to "prove" that Kennedy could have brought about some sort of magical coalition between low-income whites and blacks throughout the country. However, this belief is rooted more in the skilful manipulation of Kennedy's spin doctors than in real evidence.

Kennedy strove hard for the white "ethnic" vote, as it was called. He also had certain advantages over McCarthy and his other opponent, Governor Roger Branigan (a stand-in for President Johnson and then, after Johnson's withdrawal on March 31, Vice-President Humphrey). Kennedy had, after all, been "head cop" for four years as attorney general, and therefore was a poor target for those hoping to suggest that as a liberal he was soft on crime.

Many of the whites he was hoping to attract were Irish (although McCarthy, too, was also Irish and Catholic) and had regarded President Kennedy as near-saintly, and a validation of their cultural origins. Others were Polish. Kennedy had been very enthusiastically received during his trip to Poland after President Kennedy's death and, of course, had a reputation for not compromising with the Soviets from his dealings over the Cuban missile crisis (that this reputation was ill-founded was not revealed until after his death).

Kennedy consistently emphasised his law and order credentials during the Indiana campaign. "I was the chief law-enforcement officer of this country for four years," he kept reminding voters in the state.¹⁴ However, the emphasis on crime and race during the Indiana campaign was not just Kennedy's attempt to shift the agenda onto issues where he would be strong with low-income whites.

After President Johnson's dramatic withdrawal from the race on March 31, the war temporarily receded as the primary issue between the Democratic candidates. Kennedy and McCarthy were both doves, and so in the day immediately following Johnson's pull-out, the other major concern - violence in the cities - began to increase in importance. It became dominant when, four days after Johnson's announcement, Martin Luther King was assassinated, provoking riots in almost every major city across the country.

Kennedy was in Indianapolis the night of King's death, and helped to avert violence by speaking in the heart of the city's ghetto. Such gestures confirmed his reputation as someone that blacks would listen to, and someone who might be able to stop them rioting. Such qualities were important to the working-class whites Kennedy was hoping to attract.

There were those, of course, who regarded Kennedy's close relationship with black voters as dangerous, believing that such familiarity could only breed contempt, and that his identification with black pride encouraged the violence.

In a poorly-timed piece on the eve of Martin Luther King's death, the Wall St Journal suggested that voters might hold Kennedy responsible if the Poor People's Campaign

in Washington turned violent: "Might there not be a sharp reaction against him as the man whose speeches helped stir the rioters?" it asked.¹⁵ In fact, in the following days Kennedy accompanied police through the streets of the capital, helping to defuse tension in the black neighbourhoods.

Officially, the campaign was suspended for a week after King's death, but Kennedy's trips to riot-torn Washington, and the emotion his appearance at King's funeral elicited from the black crowds, cemented his image as someone black leaders could do business with. The frenzied crowds, often black, which characterised the television coverage of Kennedy's campaigning reaffirmed his support in this area. During the Indiana primary, it seemed possible that he might be able to pull off the all-important task of gaining votes from large numbers of low-income blacks and whites.

At the end of April, just over a week before the vote, a detailed Gallup poll of the national electorate revealed Kennedy's strengths and limitations.¹⁶ Among voters aged 21 to 29, Kennedy led McCarthy by 41% to 32% (with Humphrey on 16%). Among voters aged 30 to 49, McCarthy led Kennedy 35% to 27%, with Humphrey on 23%. With voters 50 and over, McCarthy held on at 32%, with Kennedy trailing Humphrey by 29% to 25%.

The study also revealed how McCarthy was more popular with those who had been to college, leading him to remark that "the better-educated people vote for us", but that Catholics preferred Kennedy to the former seminarian McCarthy by 36% to 30% (although McCarthy did better among

Protestants, beating Kennedy 33% to 26%).

Perhaps the most important statistic in the study, however, was Kennedy's lead over McCarthy and Humphrey among labour-union families. Kennedy was narrowly ahead of McCarthy by 31% to 29%, with Humphrey, who was popular with union bosses, on 27%. This constituency was one of Kennedy's prime targets for his coalition, of course. He needed the votes of union members, despite the best efforts of many employers and union officials to oppose him.

The union hierarchy in Indiana made an impressive effort to prevent Kennedy from winning votes among blue-collar whites. The Committee on Public Education (COPE), the political wing of the AFL/CIO, had 270,000 leaflets distributed to industrial workers in the closing weeks of the campaign which appealed to their patriotism, and ridiculed Kennedy's anti-war position. In language highly reminiscent of that used by George Wallace (who urged voters to "Stand Up For America"), the COPE leaflets encouraged them to "Stand Up For What's Good in America and Be Counted".¹⁷

COPE activities would also hinder Kennedy in Oregon. A concerted phone campaign there focused on 50,000 union members to vote for President Johnson, whose name remained on the ballot, even though he was no longer a candidate (Johnson won more than 45,000 votes in the Oregon primary, more than 12% of the vote).

Kennedy campaigned hard in the so-called "white ethnic" areas of Indiana, notably in the southern part of the state and in the suburbs around Gary. He was careful to tone down

his youthful aggressive manner which had characterised the early days of his campaign, when he had appeared at universities around the country, and generated emotional reactions from students.

For Indiana, he had cut his hair, avoided the excesses of emotional appeals - which had led several journalists to charge him with demagoguery - and emphasised how he would cut government expenditure to pay for social programmes. Interestingly, the spending cuts he cited most often were in research for supersonic travel and space exploration, both of which were proposals enthusiastically supported by President Kennedy.

In a similarly conservative vein, he stressed the money-saving aspects of his urban renewal proposals, calling for "a greater partnership between government and private enterprise to make our cities live again"¹⁸ The New York Times noted how his fiscal plans "fit perfectly with that advocated by Republican leaders in the House of Representatives".¹⁹

In the last week of the primary campaign, Kennedy's pitch for the blue-collar vote appeared to be paying off. More importantly, it was seen to be paying off. Winning these votes was only half of Kennedy's battle. He also had to convince the party bosses like Daley that he his votes had come from this constituency, and that he could repeat the effect nationwide come November. What was important to Kennedy was not only the result, but also the way it was reported to the rest of America. Thus in the days before the vote, Kennedy aides stressed the importance of the

blue-collar vote to journalists, and the theme was taken up in several media outlets.

In the sort of coverage Kennedy could only pray for, the New York Times noted on the day of the election that "In the areas surrounding Gary, Mr Kennedy has found substantial support in the white working-class wards that went heavily to George Wallace in 1964. Some of those voters indicated to reporters that although Mr Kennedy had the negro vote they looked upon him as a tough Irishman with whom they could identify."²⁰

The night before the election, Kennedy's campaign ran a half-hour television ad emphasising law and order and local control over government programmes - both high-priority issues for blue-collar whites. To actually win the election, Kennedy had only to rely on a heavy black turn-out and an average response from the white wards. However, such a result would not have been in the best interests of his long-term plan to be hailed as the new champion of the white working-class.

The total number of those voting in the primary was expected at about 600,000. Kennedy could rely on almost all of the black vote in the state, which was 135,000, or about 45% of the total he needed to win an overall majority. The NYT reported that "nearly half the votes Senator Kennedy hopes to win in this primary could be cast by negroes. If this happens, it may be the first time any politician has won an important state election from this kind of power base..."²¹

However, Kennedy could not afford to be seen to have

relied heavily on the black vote, which could not be so easily repeated elsewhere in the country. He did win the primary with 328,000 votes in an extremely high turn-out of over 775,000 Democrats. However, having won a huge slice of the black vote (NBC showed him taking over 90% of it), Kennedy's claim to be the first choice of blue-collar whites was not that convincing, even though many newspapers (and Kennedy biographers) still peddled the idea that he had achieved some sort of class-based coalition, and had united poor blacks and poor whites to challenge the political hierarchy.

Kennedy won with 42% to Branigan's 30%, with McCarthy on 27%. It was the early media analysis of the results, however, which were crucial in shaping the perception of what had happened. The idea that Kennedy had secured a coalition of poor blacks and whites immediately took root, and has lived on in nearly all of the work done on Kennedy since his death.

The New York Times correspondent relayed how "Senator Kennedy also did well with blue-collar whites in the industrial areas and with rural whites. He carried the seven largest counties in the state, where George Wallace polled his largest vote in the primary of 1964. Thus in Lake County, which contains Gary and where both negroes and blue-collar whites live, Senator Kennedy polled 57,842 to 42,902 for McCarthy and 23,290 for Branigan. He carried most of the tier counties in the southern part of the state, which are peopled by a number of white southern migrants and where the Ku Klux Klan was strong in the 1920s," and

reported how the senator made his strongest showing "in Lake County, near Chicago".²² Daley could hardly fail to be impressed by such a triumph on his own door-step.

Several commentators followed the line Kennedy was hoping for, and pushed the idea that he had done magnificently well among the working-class whites. Television correspondent Charles Quinn remembered "all these whites, all these blue-collar people and ethnic people who supported Kennedy".²³ A British television programme, This Week, covered Kennedy in Indiana and stressed how well he was doing with low-income whites²⁴. After his death, Paul Cowan wrote in the Village Voice that Kennedy was "the last liberal politician who could communicate with white working class America,"²⁵ and author Robert Coles repeated the idea that Kennedy "could do the miraculous: attract the support of...desperate blacks...and...working class white people".²⁶

In his biography of Kennedy, Jack Newfield recounts how "Kennedy carried white backlash counties like Hammond, Gary, South Bend, East Chicago..." in the Indiana primary.²⁷ In another Kennedy memoirs, David Halberstam supported the myth, suggesting that "The Poles in Gary came through, two to one...a fine gift for the omnipresent Mayor Daley,"²⁸ and Jules Witcover, in his book about the Kennedy campaign called 85 Days, claims that "Precinct breakdowns showed [Kennedy won] more than the usual number of blue-collar whites for a Democrat in the backlash neighbourhoods".²⁹

The misconception still survives. On May 15 1992, Sidney Blumenthal wrote in The New Republic that "Reforging the black-white coalition that briefly cohered in support of

Robert Kennedy's candidacy has remained an evanescent Democratic dream".³⁰

The truth, however, was that Kennedy had depended on blacks for nearly half of the votes he took to win the Indiana primary, and that support from the "white backlash" areas was not impressive at all. Kennedy did win industrial centres like Gary, but largely on the strength of his black support. McCarthy won the white suburbs which had gone for Wallace four years before. Without the huge black support, Kennedy would have run about even with Branigan.

The misconception about Kennedy's victory in the white neighbourhoods originates with a column written by Rowland Evans and Robert Novak the day after the primary, which interpreted the result as Kennedy having won 90% in black precincts, and "running two to one ahead in some Polish precincts".³¹ In fact, Kennedy lost 59 out of the 70 white precincts in Gary. The mistake is pointed out by Kennedy aides William Vanden Heuvel and Milton Gwirtzman in their biography of Kennedy, and they concede that "the Kennedy campaign organisation believed the misconception and encouraged it".³²

Kennedy himself also believed it, and made a point of thanking the blue-collar whites in his victory speech on the evening of the primary, and later that night told Larry O'Brien: "I've proved I can really be a leader of a broad spectrum. I can be a bridge between blacks and whites without stepping back from my positions."³³

Moreover, not only did Kennedy not do as well among blue-collar whites as he and many others originally

believed, there is evidence to suggest that he may have fared even worse in other states. Apart from having a particularly influential Polish community (with whom Kennedy was especially popular for his reputed anti-communism), he also held a special appeal to some industrial workers in Indiana, without which his meagre vote among whites would have been even worse.

Although elsewhere in the country his poor relations with labour officials would have been a disadvantage, in some quarters of Indiana it was something of a bonus. The International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) harboured considerable hostility for Kennedy, but the IBT had a history of extremely poor relations with truckers in Indiana, which may well have worked to Kennedy's advantage.

Although Indiana steel haulers were officially a part of the IBT, Teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa had done little to advance their cause, believing that these "owner-operators" were not proper teamsters. This attitude had led to a long-running feud between Hoffa and the steel-haulers. The year before Kennedy entered the Indiana primary, a new agreement had been worked out between the employers and Hoffa which - while very beneficial to most drivers - had not done much for the steel haulers.

Steel hauler Bill Kusley led a wildcat strike in Indiana in June 1967, which was opposed by the IBT.³⁴ Violence between Hoffa's IBT and the newly-formed Fraternal Association of Steel Haulers (FASH) broke out in the following weeks, and in August Kusley's strikers began to picket the Teamster offices in Indiana in an overt show of

defiance.

More violence ensued, and although the strike was called off in late '67, the residual bad feeling between FASH and the IBT carried on for some years. Exactly how much Kennedy benefited from the anti-Hoffa feeling in the state is difficult to quantify, but Hoffa biographer Walter Sheridan was sent by Kennedy to Indiana to maximise support among industrial workers. In fact, an early casualty of Kennedy's investigations during the McClellan hearings had been the corrupt (Democrat) mayor of Gary, who was indicted as a result of Kennedy's enquiries. Presumably, Kennedy cashed in on some residual popularity gained from ousting a criminal politician the decade before. Blue-collar whites around the rest of the country might not have been so well-disposed towards Kennedy. (The IBT in Indiana backed Governor Branigan during the primary.)

Nevertheless, whatever the true figures of the Indiana primary, Kennedy had won the battle to create an impression of himself as someone who could win the votes of poor whites. What was genuinely impressive, however, was the extent to which blacks supported him. He not only won about 90% of the Indiana black vote, but on the same day swept the primary in Washington DC by 62% to Humphrey's 37%. The capital's overwhelmingly black population favoured Kennedy by a huge margin, despite Humphrey's impressive civil rights record. Kennedy's Washington DC slate even included black radical Colin Carew.

Although John Kennedy had done well among blacks, who had supported him in some crucial states and held the balance of

votes in his 1960 victories in Chicago, Michigan and Pennsylvania, Robert Kennedy was far more popular with non-white voters. In fact, only 68% of non-white voters went for Kennedy in 1960 - the lowest total of any Democratic presidential candidate since 1952 (except for Adlai Stevenson, who won 61% in 1956, but 79% in 1952). In a poll featured in New York Magazine in July 1968, 92% of Harlem residents said that the death of their senator affected them as much, if not more, than the death of President Kennedy. McCarthy saw "no need to stir up the blacks and minorities. They were Bobby's people and I saw no point in wasting time campaigning there".³⁵

Another area where Kennedy bettered his brother's appeal was in the state of Nebraska, which held the next primary after Indiana. Although the vast rural area of Nebraska was hardly natural territory for Kennedy, it offered him the opportunity to keep the momentum from Indiana going and, as his opponents hardly bothered to put up a fight in the state, to notch up an impressive margin of victory.

John Kennedy's electoral experience in Nebraska eight years earlier had been disastrous, losing to Nixon by 62% to 38% (only the 36% from Mississippi had been worse). During the 1960 election, Robert Kennedy had complained to JFK's campaign manager in Nebraska, Rip Horton, about his poor level of organisation. Kennedy made sure the mistakes were not repeated in '68.

Kennedy also enjoyed one or two practical advantages his brother never had. Phil Sorenson (brother of JFK advisor Ted) had been lieutenant governor of the state for two

years, and in 1966 had won the gubernatorial primary (though lost the general election). His state-wide organisation was still intact, and Kennedy made thorough use of it.

While McCarthy made just one visit to the state, and the Humphrey campaign relied on the union machine to get out the vote, Kennedy made numerous appearances throughout Nebraska, and won the primary by 51% to McCarthy's 31% (with combined Humphrey and Johnson votes totalling 13%).

Kennedy's staff were keen to interpret the result as more evidence of his stunning success among poorer whites, and he did win most of the counties with concentrations of Poles and Germans. Another statistic the Kennedy campaign was keen to push was that he had won in 24 of the 25 counties where he had waged a personal campaign (and only lost the other - at the University of Nebraska - by two votes). The implication was that Kennedy could break down the hostility many felt towards him by appearing in person, and that he was becoming an increasingly attractive candidate.

Once again, however, he had relied on support from the black community for his winning margin. The concentration of blacks around Omaha had favoured Kennedy by over 85%. Nevertheless, Kennedy felt sufficiently lifted by the result to make an outright appeal to McCarthy supporters to switch to himself as the most hopeful anti-administration candidate.

Kennedy had hoped to finish off McCarthy as a serious candidate by the Oregon primary, scheduled for May 28, but his 31% in Nebraska had kept him in touch, and he was hoping for a decent result in Oregon to propel him into the most

important primary - in California - the following week.

Kennedy, on the other hand, faced problems in Oregon. It had no real black voting base on which he could draw, and his claims to be the champion of the white working class risked exposure. For all his professionalism, too, Kennedy made some basic errors in Oregon. He appointed Congresswoman Edith Green to run his campaign, largely because she had run John Kennedy's successful primary there in 1960, but Green was not a popular figure in the state in 1968, as Kennedy's intelligence network should have picked up. Kennedy also refused an offer to debate McCarthy on television in the belief that such exposure could only benefit McCarthy. Instead, it made Kennedy look arrogant and helped sway many of the don't-knows away from him.

He also began to speak unguardedly to the press. He told a reporter on May 21 that "if I get beaten in any primary, I am not a very viable candidate".³⁶ The pressure was on Kennedy to keep winning - he had to demonstrate to the party bosses his claims to be a super-candidate, winning everything he entered. (Much of the Kennedy legend was based on this principle. In 27 previous political elections, no Kennedy had ever lost.)

However, Kennedy had one eye on the California primary, and did not ensure that his campaign was organised as it should have been. Oregon had little natural constituency to offer Kennedy. Prosperous and relatively problem-free, it had no obvious ghetto area from which to launch an assault. The war was unpopular in the state, but voters preferred McCarthy's phlegmatic style to Kennedy's aggression. Gun

registration was also an important issue for many voters in the state, who resented any infringement to their constitutional right to bear arms.

On this, McCarthy had a slight edge over Kennedy. While Kennedy favoured federal registration and federal enforcement, McCarthy was less insistent, and was happy to let local states take responsibility for enforcing gun controls. In 1967, Kennedy had voted to cut federal funding for the National Board for the Protection of Rifle Practice. McCarthy had voted against the cut. In an unlucky break for Kennedy, too, the revelation that while attorney general he had authorised the tap on Martin Luther King's telephone broke in the final days of the campaign, resurrecting his old ruthless image.

On the eve of the Oregon vote, a Quayle opinion poll showed Kennedy holding a slight lead over McCarthy, by 34% to 32%. The early returns the next day were good, too. One Polish journalist even filed a story to Europe (presumably his last) confirming that Kennedy had won.³⁷

In reality, Kennedy had been beaten convincingly, by 44% to 38%, and his injudicious remark about not be a viable candidate if he lost duly reappeared to haunt him. Fortunately for him, however, attention swiftly moved on towards the California primary, which offered the largest number of delegate votes so far (174, compared with 63 from Indiana, 35 from Oregon, 30 from Nebraska and 23 from Washington DC). South Dakota (26 votes) also held its primary the same day as California.

Although there would be other primaries to follow, in a

sense California marked the biggest prize for Kennedy. Its reputation as a sort of mini-America, containing roughly all of the country's facets in microcosm, meant it was the perfect place for Kennedy to demonstrate his voter-appeal. If he won convincingly, it would probably spell the end of McCarthy's campaign, and leave a clear contest between himself and Humphrey. Defeat in California, however, would almost certainly mean the end of Kennedy's chances to secure the nomination.

Kennedy's campaign in California tested his new coalition to its limits, as New Leftist Tom Hayden joined in the effort with Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who was to end up in the Nixon administration. Kennedy's mixture of new and old politics soon ran into trouble, however, over his delegate slate, which had been assembled by old-style politician Jesse Unruh.

The Peace and Freedom Party, which had surprised many conventional politicians by registering enough signatures to get on the primary ballot, attacked the slate of delegates standing for Kennedy as a largely cynical collection of professionals who did not represent the anti-war activists he claimed to lead. In fact, many had been ready to stand as delegates for President Johnson until they were signalled to switch by Unruh. The PFP produced a pamphlet damaging to Kennedy in the anti-war movement called "Hookers for Kennedy" which exposed much of the delegate slate for what it was: a collection of Unruh's political cronies used to carving out political deals in the traditional way³⁸.

Not included in this attack on the Kennedy delegates were

Cesar Chavez, leader of the Mexican-American National Farm Workers' Association, and Paul Schrade, state chief of the radical United Auto Workers' Union.³⁹ Also on the slate from the new politics was State Senator Mervyn Dymally, a black with militant links and a leading black liberal (now LA mayor) Tom Bradley. However, these figures were joined by individuals like assemblyman Bob Movetti, who had been in favour of the war until just before the election, and had sponsored an anti-riot bill which was regarded as hostile to blacks.

There were other problems, too. Many Californian pros resented the Kennedy machine for imposing one of its own - Pierre Salinger - on the state as a senatorial candidate during the 1964 elections. Salinger had lost, and although the remnants of his organisation were helpful to the Kennedy campaign, his candidacy still grated on local Democrats.

Despite these difficulties, Kennedy's personal performance in California was excellent. He campaigned to the point of exhaustion, drawing impressive crowds wherever he went, and rectified his previous mistake of not debating McCarthy. In contrast to Oregon, there were plenty of centres where Kennedy could count on huge support. Apart from the Mexican-American vote, which was almost exclusively his following his identification with Chavez's campaigning for union recognition, and McCarthy's opposition to migrant workers' rights under the minimum wage law, there were also large black areas in Watts and around San Francisco. As usual, McCarthy's strengths lay in the white suburbs around urban centres, and he was aided by at least \$50,000 from

Humphrey's supporters, which was given with the vice-president's blessing to stop the Kennedy bandwagon.⁴¹

However, it was Kennedy's much-vaunted "personal campaigning" which captured the media's imagination. "Outside the oldest building in Los Angeles, in the little plaza in front of the eighteenth-century mission church...worshippers were holding up babies to see their champion, and hanging from the branches of liveoaks. In Watts they were standing on the roofs of automobiles, denting them with their weight, and at Griffith Park in Hollywood they were perched on the floodlight pylons, sixty feet above the heads of the crowd," wrote one reporter.⁴¹

Once again, however, Kennedy had to do more than impress journalists that he was popular with blacks. He made a special effort with low-income whites and with the sizable and influential Jewish vote (on June 18, New York would hold the largest primary, sending 190 delegates to the convention, and an impressive showing among Jewish voters in California would also provide a significant boost to the New York campaign).

There was the usual danger, too, that by cosyng up to black interests Kennedy would put off the more conservative whites, and he began to avoid main streets in Watts where his motorcade would attract hordes of young blacks and television images which would frighten whites.

During the final days of the campaign, Kennedy and McCarthy finally met for what proved to be an indecisive and disappointing debate. The discussion was aired live on television on Saturday June 1 (the day Sirhan Sirhan bought

his gun) but the contest was bland, with Kennedy repeatedly stressing his White House experience - whether it was relevant to the question or not. Kennedy scored a minor point when he forced an admission that one of McCarthy's ads had misrepresented him, claiming that Kennedy was involved in the 1965 decision to put US troops in the Dominican Republic, when of course Kennedy had left the administration by then and had opposed the intervention from his Senate seat. Nevertheless, it was a small point and certainly no knock-out blow.

More significant, however, was Kennedy's obvious pitch to white concerns about black housing. Confident that the black vote was his for keeps, Kennedy could afford to make extravagant bids for support in white suburbs. When the debate turned to urban renewal, Kennedy contrasted his own plans for ghetto regeneration with McCarthy's more orthodox ideas on inner-city dispersal to the suburbs. "When you say you are going to take 10,000 black people and move them into Orange County [a staunchly white backlash area]... you take them out where 40% of them don't have any jobs at all", said Kennedy.⁴² The effect was to petrify Orange County viewers and imply that McCarthy was about to inundate them with ghetto blacks. It was a cheap shot from Kennedy, and one which exposed his preoccupation with diverting white votes away from McCarthy. (It also prompted California Governor Ronald Reagan to note that Kennedy was "talking more and more like me".)⁴³

Kennedy, of course, was among the first to recognise what a crucial influence television coverage can have on an

election. As his brother's campaign manager, he had encouraged John Kennedy to meet Nixon for the legendary debates in 1960.

For those debates, 87% of American had easy access to a television set, a number which grew steadily through the 1960s, so that by 1970 the figure had risen to 95%.⁴⁴ Television had developed rapidly in those eight years and new levels of technology brought with them new demands on the candidates.

The stilted campaign debates were now only one way the campaigns were covered. Political media specialists believed that for optimum impact a candidate should be featured on the nightly news programmes, and so Kennedy conducted a sophisticated campaign aimed at maximum tv news exposure.

At that time, California was divided into three television areas, centred around San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego. Hitherto, candidates had circulated from day to day among the three areas, sometimes managing to hit two areas in the same day by making an appearance in, say, Los Angeles in the morning before trekking to San Francisco for an early evening event.

However, because of the advances made in jet travel (and Kennedy's wealth), he could make appearances in all three areas during the same day, when he often did, and so got coverage on all three local news stations in the state.

Kennedy's problem, however, was that the coverage was generally one-paced, in that it showed him doing much the same sort of thing - being surrounded by black (or Mexican) faces. Such pictures made good, if repetitive, television, but also gave the impression that Kennedy's candidacy relied

on the emotional reaction of crowds rather than thoughtful debate.

McCarthy, on the other hand, used the medium even better than Kennedy. Knowing that he was not much of a crowd-puller, McCarthy surrendered exposure on the nightly news in favour of appearances on daytime chat-shows. These suited his calm, witty and relaxed style and were generally longer than the quick news clips Kennedy was working so hard to achieve. Typically, McCarthy would appear for 15 or 20 minutes on a chat-show, discussing the state of the nation in a measured and reasonable manner, while Kennedy would appear for two minutes later on in the evening being crushed by youngsters swarming around his car in a ghetto.⁴⁵

The Kennedy staff realised what was happening, but could do little to prevent it. They encouraged television stations to go into Kennedy's headquarters and record an interview with him, but then he would go off to a rally or some other crowd-based event, and when the television station came to choose which footage to use that night, the crowd scenes were usually preferred, as they made better television.

In the end, Kennedy's win was a victory for his new coalition. The final totals were Kennedy 1,472,166 (46%) to McCarthy's 1,322,608 (42%). As Kennedy's staff later conceded, the winning margin "had been fashioned in Los Angeles, among the negroes and Mexican-Americans who turned out in very high numbers for a primary. McCarthy carried the suburban areas around Los Angeles and San Francisco and those metropolitan areas, like San Diego, which tend to be more conservative and have a specially high proportion of

white voters who moved to California from the South or Southwest."⁴⁶

The strong appeal to blacks and Mexican-Americans won Kennedy this primary, and not any fusion of poor whites and blacks. By working with the new Mexican-American organisations, lead by Chavez, Kennedy had circumvented the old political route of party machinery, and had drawn out black voters in huge numbers. Some Mexican-American precincts gave him 100% of the ballot.

"In the counties of the Central Valley, the Mexican-American vote stimulated by Chavez had given Kennedy majorities, but in all the other ranching, agricultural and sparsely-settled areas of the state he did poorly," admitted his campaign organisers.⁴⁷ By working with unorthodox political "bosses" like Chavez and "black Jesus", a local community leader in Oakland, Kennedy applied the old rules to the new game. Some of these figures from his coalition of new politics could still be used like old ward managers, turning out the vote for the appointed candidate.

"In Mexican districts that morning [of the primary], in house after house, workers came around saying very simply: 'Cesar says this is the day to vote for Robert Kennedy'. It was the biggest turnout in their history. They voted roughly 15-1 over McCarthy..." noted one journalist.⁴⁸

One area where Kennedy had succeeded with whites, however, was with the Jewish vote, and thanks to concerted efforts in the last weeks of the campaign, had drawn about level with McCarthy - a good omen for what might have transpired in New York.

An equally encouraging result came from the South Dakota primary, which Kennedy won with surprising ease, beating McCarthy by 49% to 20%. What was especially gratifying, however, was that Humphrey only managed 30% (it was actually still Johnson's name which appeared on the ballot, but a vote for LBJ was recognised as support for his vice-president). Humphrey was born in South Dakota, and should have appealed strongly to its farming communities. Had Kennedy not been killed, it could have proved a damaging blow to Humphrey as the party bosses would have been unimpressed with such a poor showing in his native state.

Had Kennedy lived, however, it is unlikely that the California result would have knocked McCarthy out of the race. McCarthy had finished a strong second and may have fancied his chances of beating Kennedy in New York. In fact, McCarthy went on to win in New York on June 18, taking 63 delegates (30 still went for Kennedy, even though he was dead, in the hope that another candidate might emerge behind whom they could rally).

If Kennedy had gone on to win the nomination, it is likely that he would have done so not on the strength of blue-collar white support, but on massive turnouts from black and Mexican-American areas. This sort of power base might have frightened the party power brokers, but Kennedy's staff may have been able to keep the real nature of his coalition hidden, and exaggerated instead his popularity with white ethnics to make the constituency appear more palatable.

Of course, most of the delegates at the convention would

come from states without primaries, and while Kennedy was busy demonstrating his voter appeal, Humphrey was quietly picking up delegate promises from around the country. Ultimately, however, the party would probably have gone for the candidate which it believed was most electable (unlike in recent years, where the wider primary system has thrown up a series of losing nominees). The 1968 nomination was largely decided by the party professionals, however, and Kennedy aide Richard Goodwin recalls the conversation he had with the senator after the first California returns were in and just before Kennedy left his suite in the Ambassador hotel to make his victory speech.

According to Goodwin, Kennedy believed that too many delegates not subject to primary results were controlled by governors and other establishment political leaders beholden to Johnson and Humphrey, and put his own chances of securing the nomination at 50-50.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, others on his staff were confident after the California result that they had the potential to win enough delegates.

Figures drawn up by Kennedy's campaign and shown to the senator on the evening of the California primary estimates of his delegate strength - either firmly committed or "preferring" him at 524 delegates, out of a total of 1,312 needed to win.⁵⁰

McCarthy, at that point, had 204 delegates either committed to him, or preferring him for the first ballot. Humphrey, on the other hand, already had 994, with only 872 left undecided. It would have been a tall order for Kennedy, but if he could have pulled off a victory in New York (where

he certainly would have been favourite) he may have managed it. His organisers predicted that come the convention, they would have most of McCarthy's delegates, and were aiming at a total of 1,432 to Humphrey's 1,153.

Despite McCarthy's declaration in 1985 that "I was prepared to give my delegates over to Ted on the second ballot, but I wouldn't have done it for Bobby",⁵¹ McCarthy's campaign manager Jeremy Larner conceded that at the Chicago convention "it was commonly accepted that no delegate count on earth could have stopped Ted's brother from taking the nomination".⁵²

There is only a limited point in guessing what would have happened at the convention, or in the general election in November, but had Kennedy won the nomination, it appears likely that he would have been a stronger candidate than Humphrey, and beaten Nixon fairly easily.

Of course, the results from November '68 are complicated by Wallace's candidacy as an independent, and Kennedy supporters' claims that he would have taken significant numbers of Wallace votes had he lived. In July that year, the Village Voice suggested that "many of them [Wallace supporters] planned to vote for Kennedy this year...but now that Kennedy is dead they are nearly lost to the Democrats".⁵³ However, the hard evidence for supposing that Kennedy was the first choice of many Wallace voters remains fairly thin. For example, Lake County went to Humphrey in November anyway (by 47% to Nixon's 36% and Wallace's 16%), so a Kennedy nomination might not have been very beneficial in attracting white ethnic support.

Wallace did cost the Democrats victory, however. If Kennedy (or any other candidate) had done only marginally better than Humphrey in a small number of states, it would have been enough to swing the election. Apart from the 46 electoral college votes which Wallace won outright, Wallace came second or held the balance of votes in 222 more. Nixon beat Humphrey by 301 electoral votes to 191, and by a popular vote of 43.4% to 42.7%, with Wallace taking 13.5%. If the states where Wallace held the balance and Nixon won by less than 3% had gone to Humphrey, the Democrats would have won with an electoral college majority of 275 to 261.

However, Kennedy's strength would have been in generating a huge turnout among the black and Mexican-American voters, rather than taking votes away from Wallace. If he had won on that basis, it would have been a whole new power-base. By 1968 this base may just have been sufficiently strong, in electoral terms, to present the presidency to Robert Kennedy (or even to his brother Ted). However, no other candidate - even Jesse Jackson - has managed to reproduce the sort of enthusiasm Kennedy enjoyed among blacks and Mexican-Americans. Had he won, the Democratic Party would have realigned behind this new coalition which Kennedy had pulled together in little more than 1,000 days as senator.

In this chapter on Kennedy's bid for the presidency in 1968, his initial hesitancy and electoral results have been explored in some detail. His success in the primaries relied heavily on black and Mexican-American support. He won in Indiana, Nebraska, South Dakota, Washington DC and

California, losing only in Oregon. Elsewhere, notably in the South, these ethnic blocks of support might not have proved so powerful.

By appearing to appeal to "Wallace supporters", however, Kennedy may have managed to hide the true nature of his coalition (as he had in Indiana) to persuade local Democratic Party officials around the country to support him.

NOTES

1. Wall St. Journal Oct. 17 '68
2. New Republic Oct. 15 '68
3. Ibid
4. The Nation Nov 14 '68
5. American Melodrama, p111
6. Life, March '67
7. Ibid no. 5 p61
8. Edwards was president of the ADA, and he was one of the candidates RFK had campaigned for during the 1966 elections.
9. Hyman p104
10. Ibid no. 5 p89
11. Vital Statistics on American Politics (Harold Stanley & Richard Nieri - all voting stats from here unless otherwise stated)
12. Witcover p80
13. Ibid p87
14. New York Times May 3 '68
15. WStJ Apr 3 '68
16. Ibid no 5 p165
17. NYT May 6, '68
18. WStJ May 1 '68
19. NYT May 6 '68
20. NYT May 7 '68
21. Ibid
22. NYT May 8 '68
23. Stein p276

24. This Week, May 12 '68

25. Schlesinger p891

26. Ibid

27. Newfield p83

28. Halberstam p122. Halberstam, although sympathetic to Robert Kennedy, had been a thorn in JFK's side. The President had suggested to The New York Times publisher Arthur Hays Sulzberger that Halberstam be removed from his position as correspondent from Vietnam because the stories he was filing were not sufficiently sympathetic to the administration's policy. The NYT refused.

29. Quoted in Vanden Heuvel p348

30. New Republic May 15 1992. Clinton's association with Kennedy's legacy is double-edged. In the final weeks before his presidential election victory, a man was arrested in Las Vegas after threatening to assassinate Clinton. "This Thursday coming up Bill Clinton is coming to town and he's going to have a big surprise just like Robert Kennedy. He's going to get what he deserves. Robert Kennedy, he was killed," the man was quoted as threatening (Evening Standard, October 21 1992).

At the Democratic Convention in New York on July 15 1992, Ted Kennedy also alluded to his brother's poverty coalition. Addressing the convention immediately after the documentary film of Robert Kennedy had been shown, Ted Kennedy declared: "Perhaps more than any other leader in memory, my brother Bobby reached across the deepest divides of American life - Black activist and blue collar, suburb and city, the young students on campus who protested the war and the young

soldiers drafted to fight it...".

31. Ibid

32. Ibid

33. Witcover p180

34. See Dan Moldea - The Hoffa Wars pp180-220

35. Eugene McCarthy. Personal Interview May 1985

36. Witcover p207

37. Herzog p171

38. PFP ran Eldridge Cleaver as their nominee. He was Minister of Information for the Black Panthers, but on parole for murder at the time of the election and did not meet the minimum age requirement to be President as stipulated by the Constitution.

39. Paul Schrade was in the pantry with Robert Kennedy when the senator was shot. Schrade was also wounded, hit by a bullet in the head. He has since led the struggle to have Los Angeles Police Department records on the assassination made public, and for the murder investigation to be re-opened. With other assassination experts, Schrade believes that there may have been more than one gun fired at Kennedy that night, and that Sirhan may have been part of a conspiracy.

40. Herzog p149

41. Ibid no. 5 p131

42. Ibid p344

43. Witcover p247

44. From Statistical Abstract of the US Dept of Commerce p551

45. Halberstam p203

46. Vanden Heuvel p379

47. Ibid

48. Halberstam p195

49. Richard Goodwin, private conversation with RFK, quoted in Stein p313

50. Appendix to Vanden Heuvel

51. Ibid no. 34

52. Lerner p189

53. Village Voice July '68: There is no way of knowing how the Wallace votes would have split had he not been a candidate, although it is likely that most would have gone to the Democrats.

IV - CONCLUSION

HAD HE SURVIVED, of course, many things might have been different. Tom Hayden wrote in the late 1980s that "If you believe that [Kennedy would have won the presidency], his death becomes one of the central events of your life. That single event was the death of hope for peace in Vietnam for five, six or seven years, and the death of political hope for many people..."¹

That might be overstating Kennedy's political contribution, but there is no doubt that an unquantifiable legacy remains. A certain political generation grew up around Kennedy's coalition, the "burned out Robert Kennedy workers", as Hayden calls them. Tip O'Neill noted that in the immediate aftermath of the Watergate scandal, there was significant public pressure on government to open up, and the influence of Robert Kennedy could be detected in the new intake of elected officials.

During the Congressional elections of 1974 and 1976, many new Democrats were elected to Congress, promising to clean

up Washington and do away with the old vestiges of Congressional privilege and seniority. In many ways, these "Watergate babies" heralded the decline of the old party system. Many were elected without significant machine support, and felt no obligation to be loyal to the party.

O'Neill - no friend of Kennedy's - "was struck by how many told me they had no interest in politics until Robert Kennedy's Presidential campaign in 1968. Kennedy was their hero, and he was the one who had turned them on to the possibility of running for office".²

This Congressional generation were faced with many of the same issues which Kennedy tackled in the mid-60s, like where Democrats stood on foreign intervention, what new proposals they had to promote racial equality, and how they could reorganise the left after the demise of union power.

Kennedy may not have been a prophet for the Democratic Party, but he did pioneer programmes and approaches which others would only recognise years later. His four-year journey from Cold Warrior to standard New Dealer to radical liberal criticising welfare dependency was a transformation which took the main body of American liberalism 30 years to complete.

However, Kennedy's full impact on the development of American radicalism has yet to be fully investigated. Although much has been written about him since 1968, many commentators have found it difficult to separate the substance from the hype. All of Kennedy's biographers knew him personally, and so lacked a detachment helpful to cold analysis. Others who have written about him have often been

distracted by issues other than straight politics, like his alleged involvement with Marilyn Monroe, and the circumstances surrounding his assassination.

It was Emerson who wrote that "Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this."³ However, so far the books on Robert Kennedy have all been written by his contemporaries, most of them his friends (Emerson warns that the "love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue").

The books which significantly feature Robert Kennedy can be considered in several loose chronological groups, starting with the series of post-Dallas tributes written about President Kennedy by some of JFK's closest advisors. This clutch of stylish hagiographies includes Arthur Schlesinger's 1,000 Days in the White House, Ted Sorenson's Kennedy, both written in 1965, and Pierre Salinger's With Kennedy (1966).

These early histories, written at the very beginning of Robert Kennedy's Senate career, portray him as the late President's dependable lieutenant, obviously more important to the administration than Lyndon Johnson. "As for the President," notes Salinger, "his closest friend and confidant was his brother, Robert It was Bob that JFK turned to in moments of crisis....His advice to JFK was sound and his judgement good".⁴ Schlesinger is even more emphatic about the Attorney General's relationship with the President, which he describes as "an extraordinary partnership....The communication was virtually telepathic

and their communion complete....Especially in foreign affairs, one turned more and more to Bobby".⁵

He soon became the subject of biographies in his own right. As early as 1967, William Shannon's The Heir Apparent appeared, followed the following year by Penn Kimball's Bobby Kennedy and the New Politics. Both were written while Kennedy was still alive, as was the bulk of Margaret Laing's Robert Kennedy. Largely sympathetic, they concentrate on Kennedy's chances of eventually winning the presidency, and Shannon's effort also presents the idea of Kennedy as an existential politician, a theme which would be taken up with great enthusiasm in the works which appeared after his death.

Although Ted Kennedy had declared in his eulogy at Robert Kennedy's funeral that "my brother need not be idealised or enlarged in death beyond what he was in life," several biographies appeared in the following year which were generously sympathetic to his memory.⁶ Written by journalists friendly with Kennedy, they emphasised his attractive qualities, and were weak on criticism. The Unfinished Odyssey of Robert Kennedy, by David Halberstam (1968) was followed by Jules Witcover's 85 Days and Jack Newfield's Robert Kennedy: A Memoirs a year later. All were written by young liberal journalists who perceived the Nixon victory as an unmitigated calamity. Kennedy, in exaggerated contrast, is presented as a political saviour

"The year 1968 marked a breakthrough for the new politics, but only that; the old politics still hung on. Robert Kennedy might have achieved transition; in his

absence there was, instead, chaos," mourned Witcover.⁷ Newfield's was even more desolate: "From this time forward, things would get worse," he wailed. "The stone was at the bottom of the hill and we were alone."⁸

A study of the 1968 election called American Melodrama (1969) by a team of reporters from the London Times was more detached, and analysed Kennedy's campaign with a colder eye than their American colleagues. Similarly, On His Own RFK 1964-68 (published in 1970) by two of Kennedy's aides, William Vanden Heuvel and Milton Gwirtzman, largely avoids the excesses of journalism, and offers a detailed, if partial, analysis of Kennedy's Senate years.

The earlier emotional works of both the JFK and RFK biographers spawned an equally emotional revisionism in the early 1970s which was every bit as unbalanced as the original accounts. During those years a reaction against government institutions gained considerable force. Journalists of the 1960s were mocked by their colleagues for having been so gullible in believing the hype about Vietnam, the Great Society, and the piety of the Kennedys. However, the gullibility was often replaced with cynicism, which did not necessarily make for clearer analysis.

The Kennedy Neurosis (1973) by Nancy Gager Clinch was aimed at President Kennedy's drive for dominance and power, which it explained in largely unconvincing psychoanalytical terms. Henry Fairlie's The Kennedy Promise (1973) also sought to debunk the legend but its analysis is flawed by such an obvious anti-Kennedy bias, which accuses the brothers of magnifying the Cuban Missile Crisis for

political gain, and for keeping the country in a state of feverish excitement as they lead it from one crisis to the next. At least Fairlie did not claim to be a clinical observer of Robert Kennedy's politics, conceding that "it is difficult to write sensibly of the man" before concluding that "his achievements were so slight".⁹

Others were also sceptical about the Kennedy record, and New Left historians began to depict the Kennedy brothers as aggressive Cold Warriors, responsible for Vietnam and the Cuban Missile Crisis. In David Horowitz's 1973 overview of American foreign policy since the Second World War (From Yalta to Vietnam), John and Robert Kennedy are presented as a couple of jingoistic machomen. "Robert Kennedy declared there was no question but that the President would order the use of nuclear weapons to save Berlin," he noted.¹⁰

The first hints of a reaction to the revisionism appeared in the following years with Arthur Schlesinger's epic Robert Kennedy and His Times (1978). However, Schlesinger's biography is not so much a work of post-revisionism as a seductive restatement of the early assessments of Kennedy as a great liberal hope. Schlesinger's book, it should be remembered, appeared during a Democratic presidency at a time when the Republicans looked to be set for many years in opposition, and it avoids the apocalyptic tone of those written during the first Nixon administration.

A more balanced picture began to emerge, at least in the more serious studies. While the BBC produced a programme in 1980 (Reputations) which offered a studied interpretation of Kennedy (even if it did appear to dwell on Eugene McCarthy's

bitter analyses), a series of sensational stories began to emerge with increasing frequency in the world's popular press.

Originally fuelled by revelations at the Senate hearings on assassinations in 1977, which suggested that John Kennedy had cavorted with at least one woman close to the Mafia, the press accusations were widened to include Robert Kennedy's relationship with various women, particularly Marilyn Monroe.

Such accusations had actually begun much earlier, during Kennedy's 1964 election to the Senate. The Strange Death of Marilyn Monroe, published in September that year, was written by rightwing activists Frank Capell. It alleges that Kennedy was involved in a communist conspiracy to kill Monroe to protect his reputation. The charges were not taken seriously at the time, and the book did Kennedy no perceivable harm, but as the line between serious history and popular journalism began to blur in the late 1970s and 1980s, the allegations resurfaced in more respectable studies than Capell's.

There are two main theories which implicate Kennedy with Monroe's death. Both agree that President Kennedy, and/or Robert Kennedy were sexually involved with the actress. The first suggests that Monroe, danerously unbalanced in the summer of 1962, threatened to expose her relationship with the President, and that the Attorney General had her killed to keep her quiet.

The second believes that Monroe was killed by anti-Kennedy forces, either a CIA/FBI conspiracy, as

suggested by Norman Mailer in 1973, or the Mafia, as outlined in Anthony Summers' Goddess of 1985, in the hope that an investigation of her murder would bring to light her past sexual activity with the Kennedys as so destroy the administration through scandal.

Despite the flimsy evidence, the notion that Robert Kennedy was linked to Monroe's death gained popular currency during the mid-'80s, when the history of the Kennedy family began to be examined as though it was a century-long soap opera. In 1985, The Kennedys: An American Drama appeared, which traced the family's rise and fall in generally pedestrian terms, although it does reserve venom for its study of Robert Kennedy's children. The Fitzgeralds and The Kennedys: An American Saga of 1986 is in similar vein, although its investigation ends with the election of John Kennedy to the White House.

At the more serious end of analysis is Alonzo L. Hamby's 1985 Liberalism and Its Challengers, a survey of the American left since the Second World war. Hamby suggest that John and Robert Kennedy were from the same tradition of liberalism, both working outside the system and relying on great personal appeal. However, he repeats the standard myth that Robert Kennedy relied on "the lower-middle-class blue-collar-ethnics" for support, and suggests that Robert Kennedy "alone could revive the old Roosevelt coalition", when in fact Kennedy was forced to carve out a replacement for the old Roosevelt coalition. Nevertheless, Hamby does recognise that "the most intense criticism of both [John and Robert Kennedy] appears to have come from believers in

ideological formulas as the key to political leadership,"¹¹ a view echoed by Robert Kennedy's daughter Kathleen Townsend in 1988: "He didn't think that words like liberal and conservative were very appropriate. Maybe that's why liberals were always very uncomfortable with my father."¹²

More recently, the Robert Kennedy legacy has been re-examined in the context of his brother's presidency. Thomas Reeves' scathing biography of the late President, A Question of Character (1991), also takes a swipe at his Attorney General, who was "more intense, ambitious, abrasive and less inclined towards lechery [than John Kennedy]".

There are also, of course, several books which appeared under Robert Kennedy's name, including The Pursuit of Justice and The Enemy Within, both written as real-life crime-busters during the period before his Senate career when his prime concern was law enforcement. To Seek a Newer World (1967) was also motivated by obvious political gain, as it sought to highlight the difference between himself and the old-style Democratic Party exemplified by the Johnson administration. When Kennedy ran for President, it was quickly billed as his manifesto, although it was not much more than a collection of Senate speeches.

More interesting are 13 Days - Kennedy's account of the Cuban Missile Crisis - and the oral histories he made in the years after the Dallas assassination which were published in 1988. Although 13 Days was written in last months of Kennedy's life, it did not appear until after his death (1971), and so the voters never knew of his secret deals with the Soviets.

Robert Kennedy: In His Own Words, the edited oral histories, are also remarkably candid. Kennedy makes no pretence at concealing his distaste for Johnson (who is described as "mean, bitter, vicious - an animal in many ways"), or for certain foreign leaders (including Nehru and Adenauer).¹³ The private and frank conversations reveal Kennedy characteristically hesitant about his political future. He is keen that the "Kennedy wing" of the party should carry on, although he realises that it is largely up to him to determine exactly what that wing should stand for.

His subsequent years as senator ensured that it became associated with the more radical elements of the party. However, Kennedy's Presidential campaign possibly marked the zenith of radical liberalism. His alternative coalition was submerged by the old Democratic orthodoxy which, in turn, was overpowered by the conservatism of the 1970s and 1980s.

The notion of liberalism declined so rapidly that by the 1988 election it had become the ideology which dared not speak its name, being referred in sinister tones as "the L word".

The dialectic of liberalism missed a beat with the death of Robert Kennedy in 1968, and the development of radicalism was retarded by the split of the Democratic Party into the McGovernite wing, and the traditional, labour wing (exemplified by Mondale's candidacy). A Robert Kennedy presidential nomination, successful or not, might have provided the party with the direction it has been lacking since 1964, and given back liberalism its respectability.

This study of Kennedy's Senate career has attempted to measure how Kennedy's new liberalism developed, and has tentatively suggested that many of his policies were put onto the mainstream political agenda only many years after his death (notably enterprise zones as a form of urban renewal).

It has also tried to avoid some of the excesses of earlier biographies of the Senator. All of those who have written biographies of Kennedy before this study was completed knew him personally. Most were close friends of his, and of similar political generations.

As this study enjoyed the considerable advantage of hindsight, and was not written by an American, it offers a slightly different judgement on Kennedy. It relies substantially on evidence from primary Congressional sources, and is able to trace the development of his policies through the 1970s and 1980s.

Most of the previous biographies, too, were written by American liberals (Schlesinger, Witcover, Halberstam, Newfield, Vanden Heuvel and Gwirtzman), and their work to some extent reflects the American liberal agenda of the late 1960s and early 1970s (a heavy emphasis on Vietnam and Kennedy's "class-based" coalition).

Issues like the crusade against the tobacco industry and Kennedy's proposals for tackling unemployment became more significant in the 1980s as issues of jobs and the environment rose on the political agenda. Thus this study gives greater weight to the senator's policies on those areas.

Now a new generation of historians, writing at the end of the Twentieth Century, unencumbered by the influences of personal contact with Robert Kennedy or his contemporaries, can begin to offer fresh interpretations of the senator's contribution to American liberalism.

NOTES

1. Witcover p342 (1988 edition)
2. O'Neill p329. Other politicians inspired by Robert Kennedy include German activist Petra Kelly. Kelly, the leader of the Green movement which swept through Germany during the 1980s, had worked in Kennedy's senate office in Washington. Kelly was found dead in her apartment in October 1992.
3. Emerson, "The American Scholar", delivered in Boston 1837, from The Norton Anthology of American Literature (Norton 1979)
4. Salinger p222
5. Schlesinger: 1,000 Days p245
6. Witcover p306
7. Witcover p321. The word "day" or "days" appears in the title of a remarkable number of works by and about the Kennedys. Perhaps "day" is chosen for its sense of immediacy and urgency. Apart from Witcover's 85 Days, there are plenty of examples. RFK's account of the Cuban Missile Crisis is, of course, 13 Days. Schlesinger's history of the JFK White House is 1,000 Days (while his chapter on RFK's presidential campaign in Robert Kennedy and His Times is called "The Long Day Wanes"), and a collection of RFK speeches from 1968 is titled A New Day. An article by Theodore White (for Life) on RFK's last primary is called "A Precious Last Day", while Richard Goodwin's article is titled "A Day in June". Ted Kennedy's book published to coincide with his 1980

presidential campaign is Our Day and Generation.

8. Newfield p312

9. Fairlie p180

10. Horowitz p278

11. Hamby p323

12. Townsend in Witcover p346. Kathleen Townsend Kennedy has run for Congress (unsuccessfully) for a constituency in Maryland. She is an active proponent of community service, and in 1992 lobbied for new legislation whereby graduation from high school would require 72 hours public service in the local community.

13. Reeves p210

14. RFK: In His Own Words p313

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